

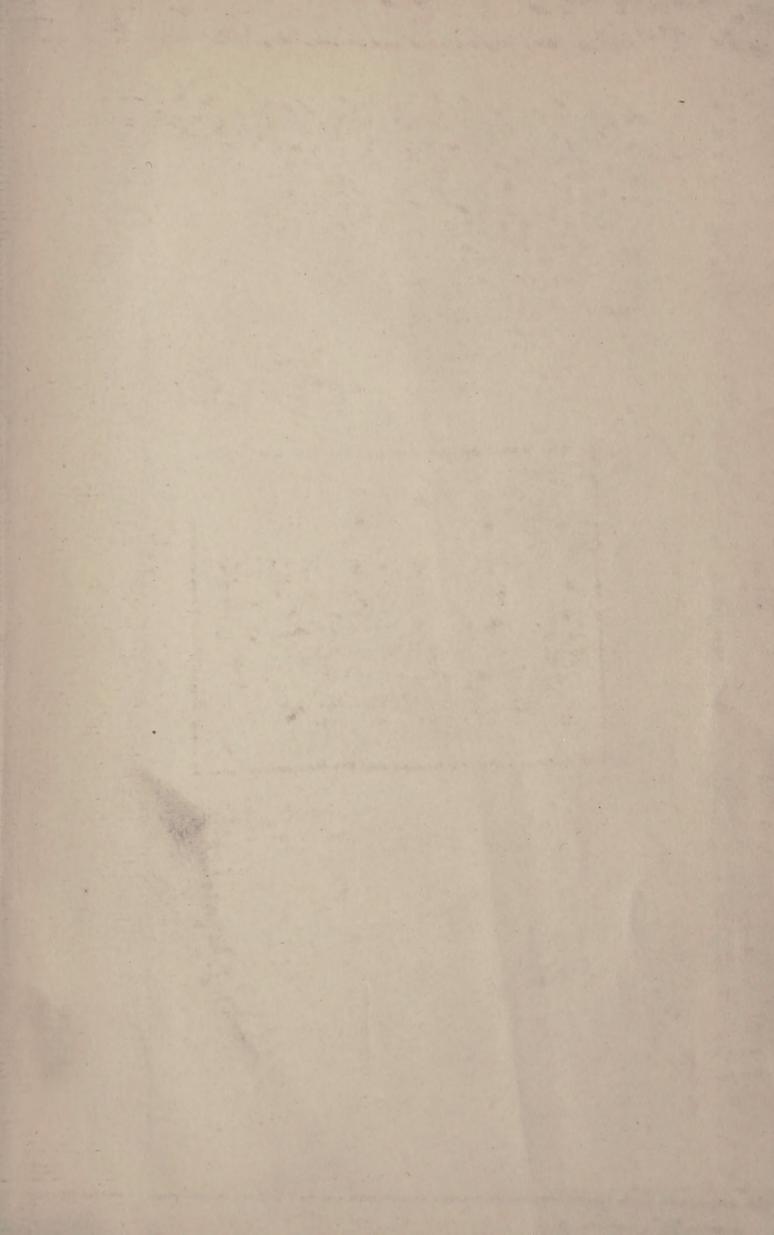
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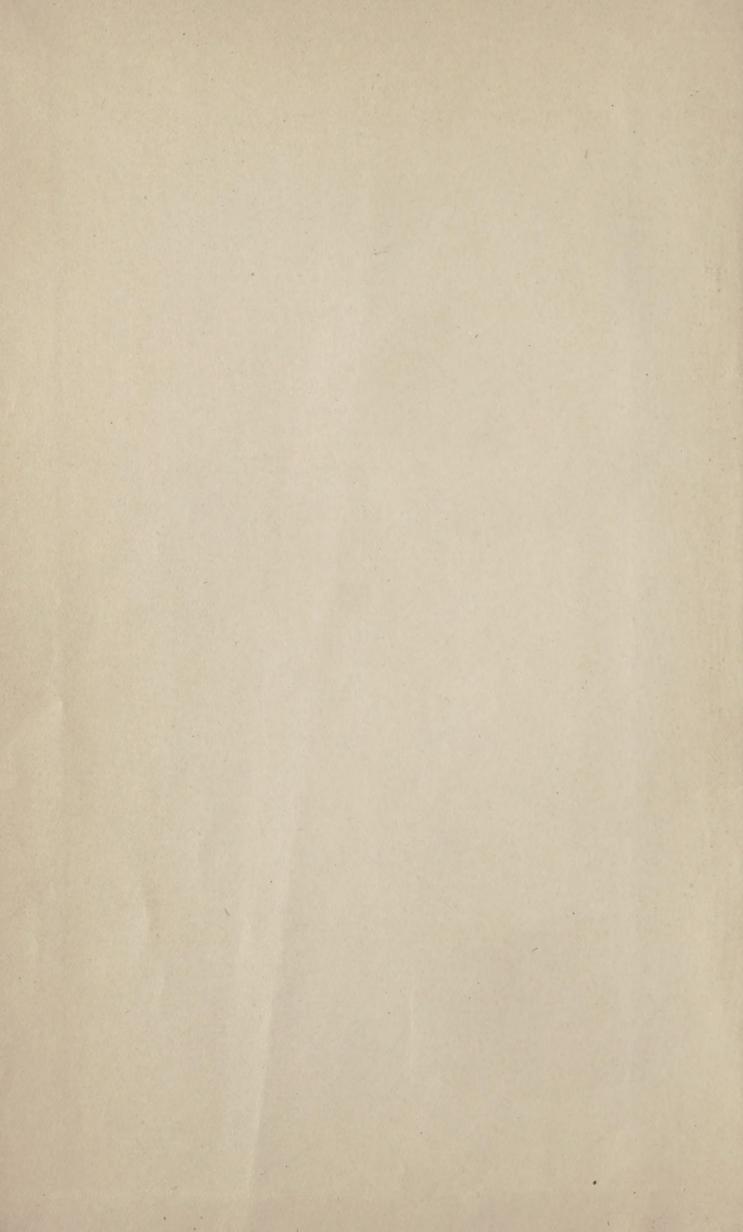
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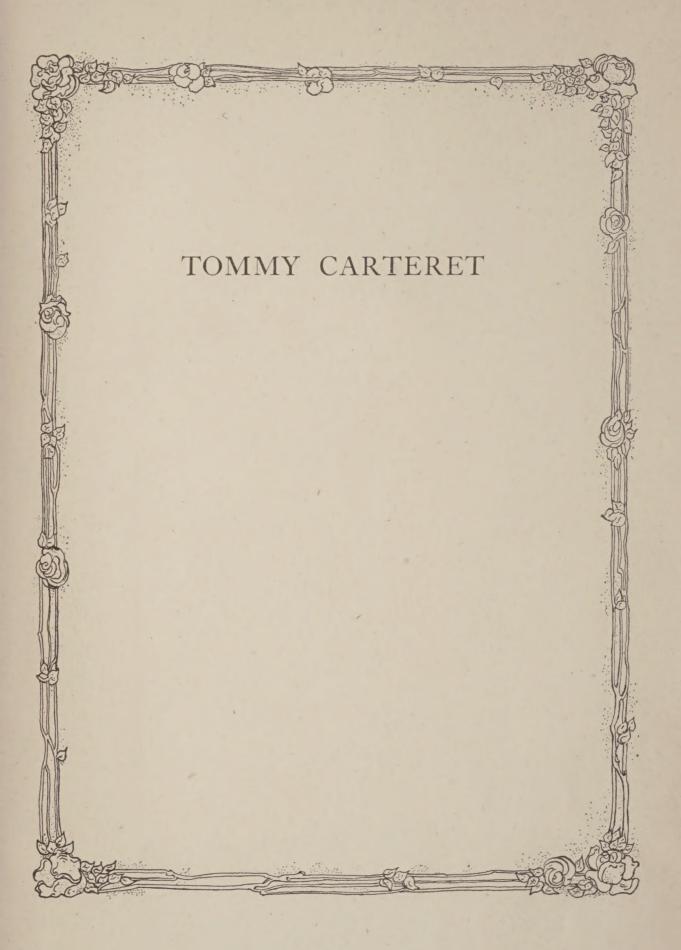
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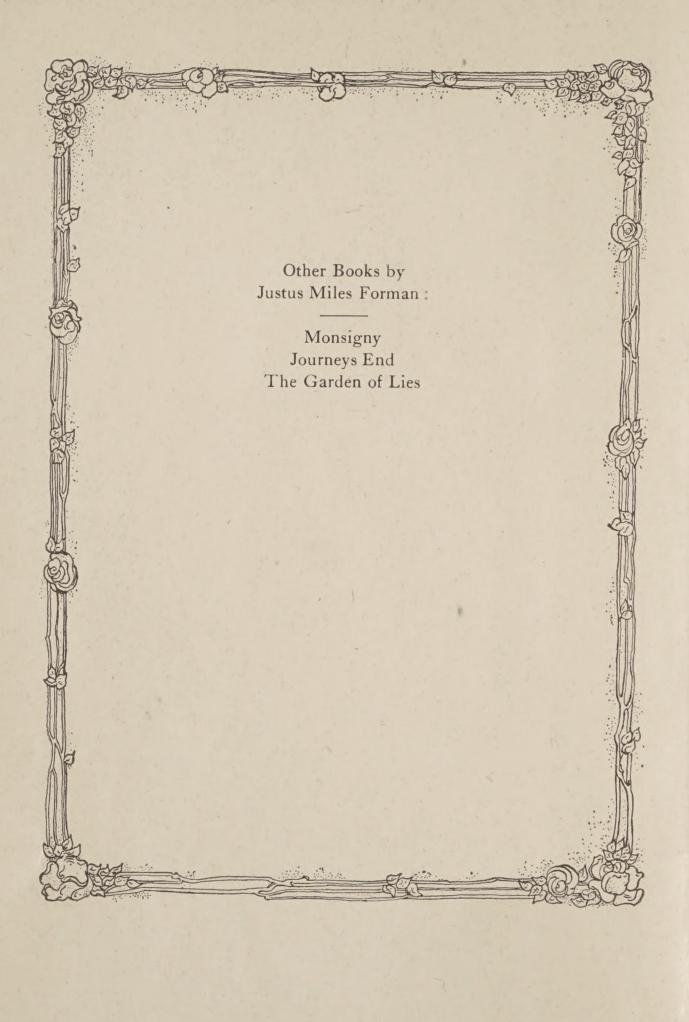
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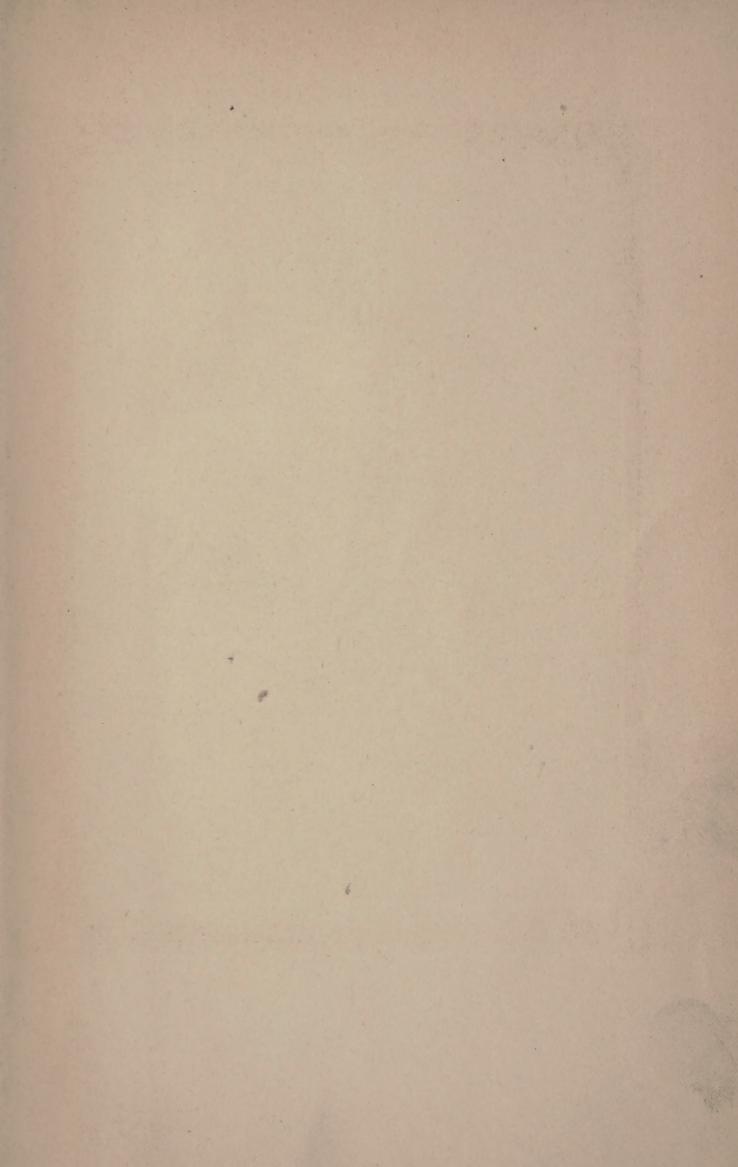
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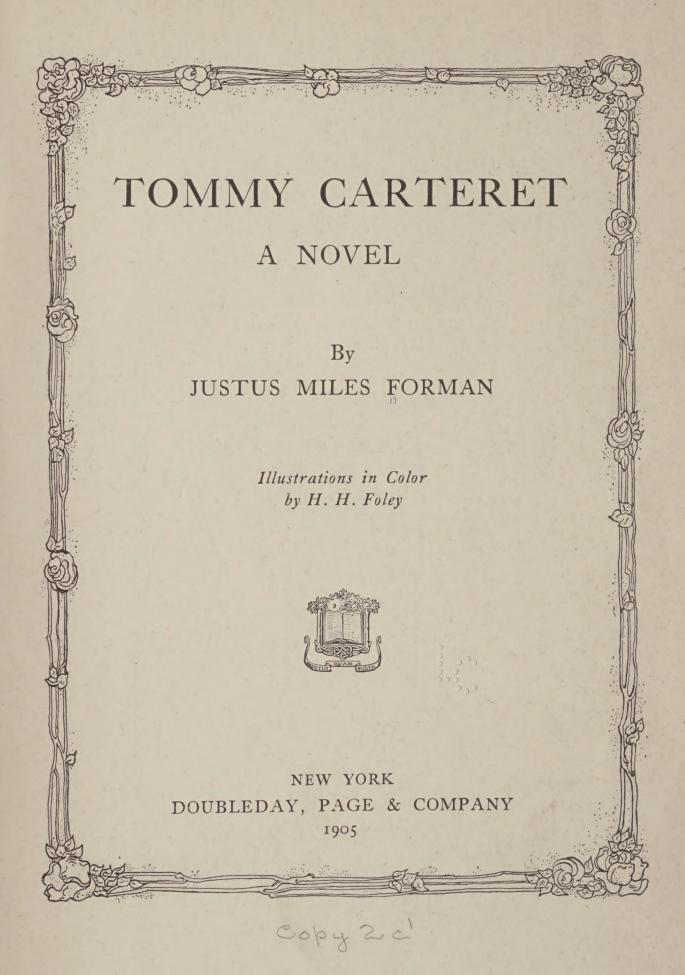


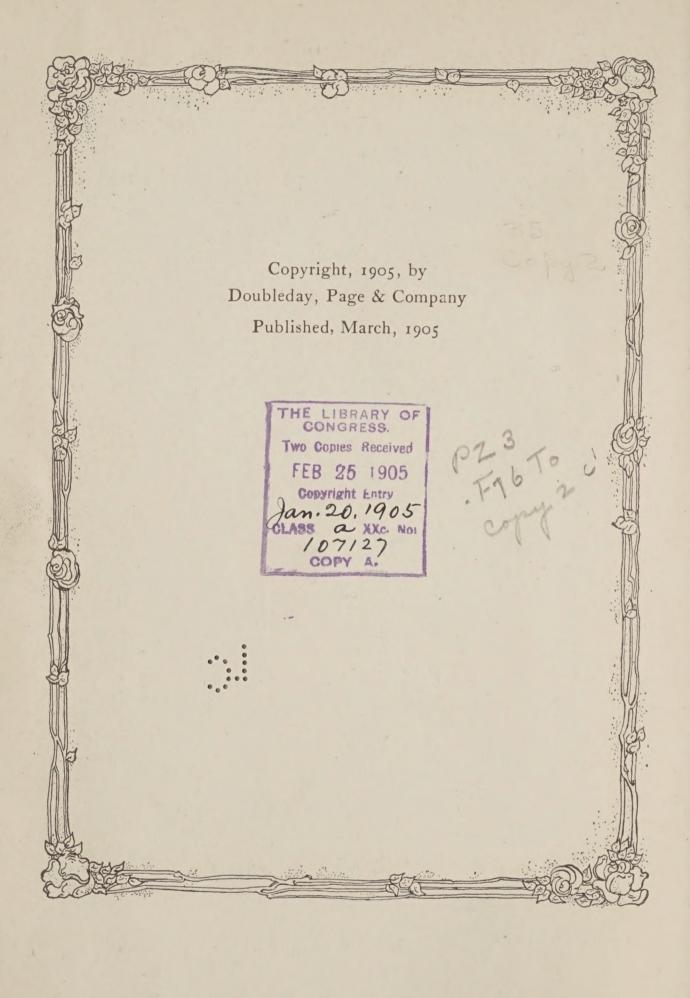


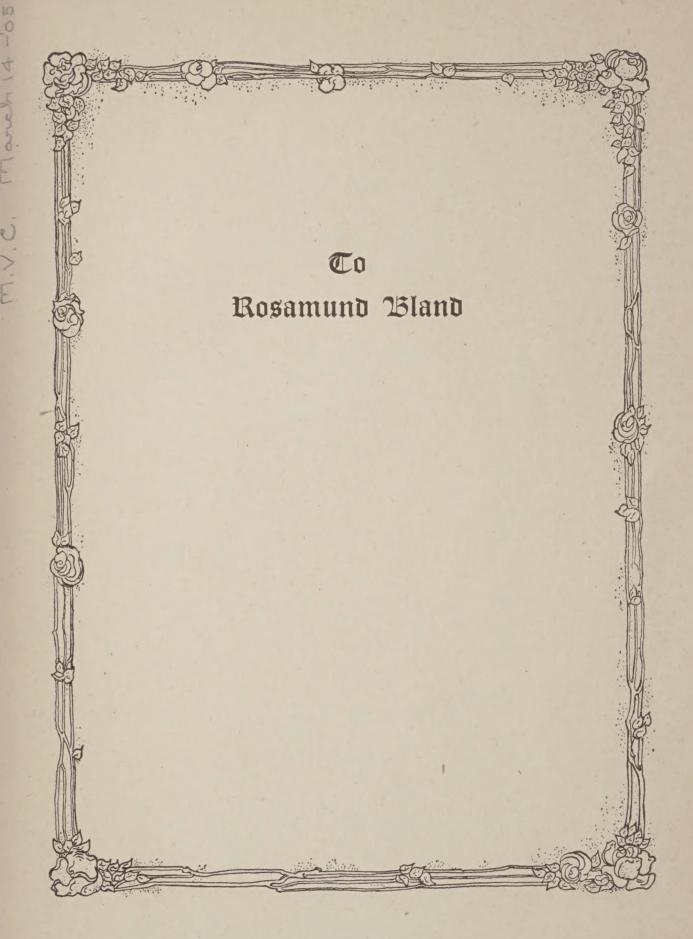


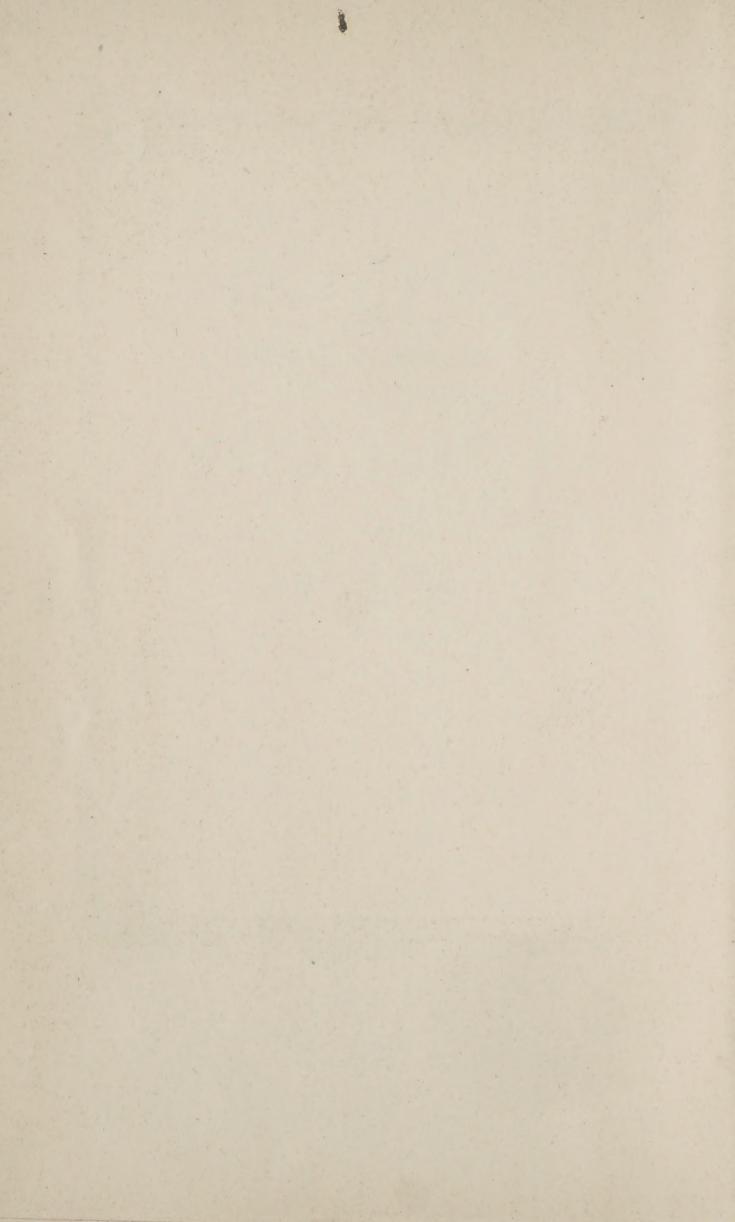


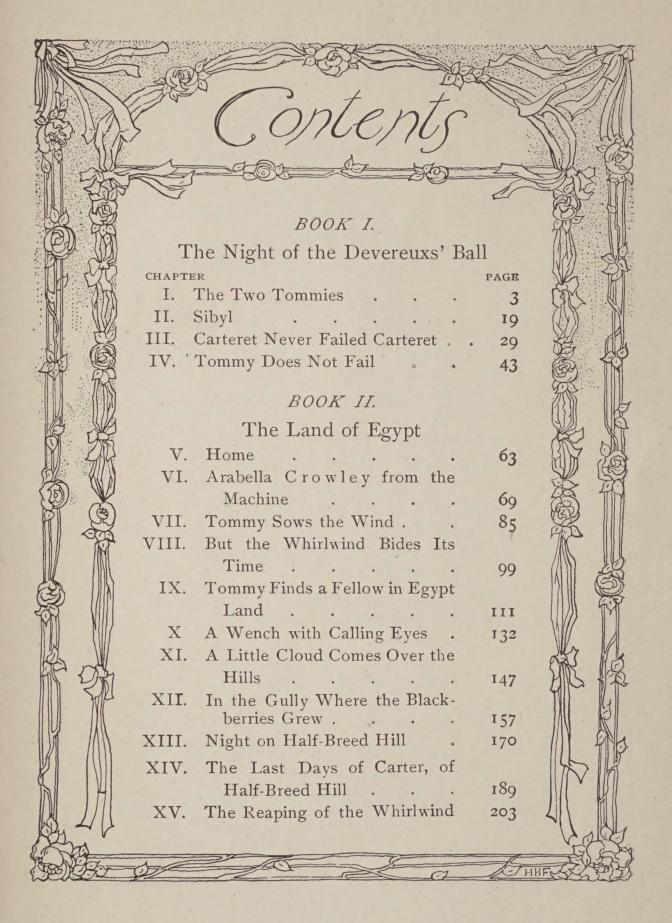
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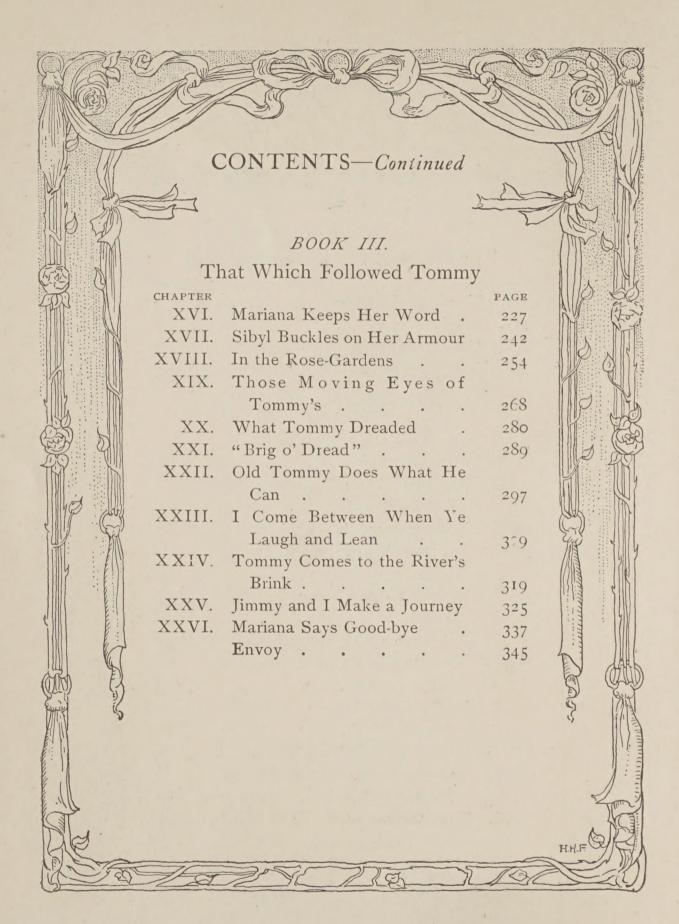


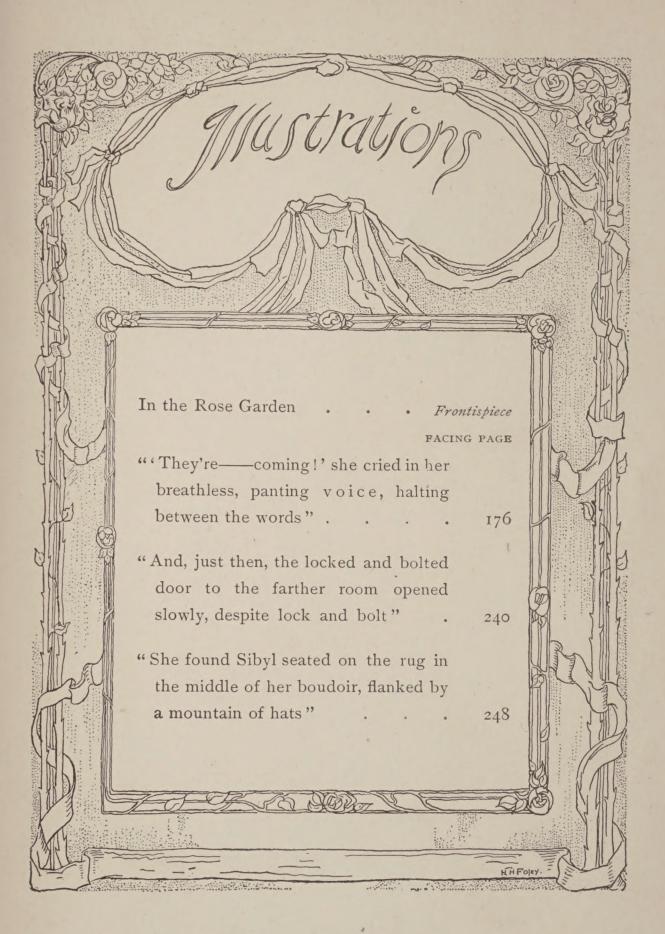


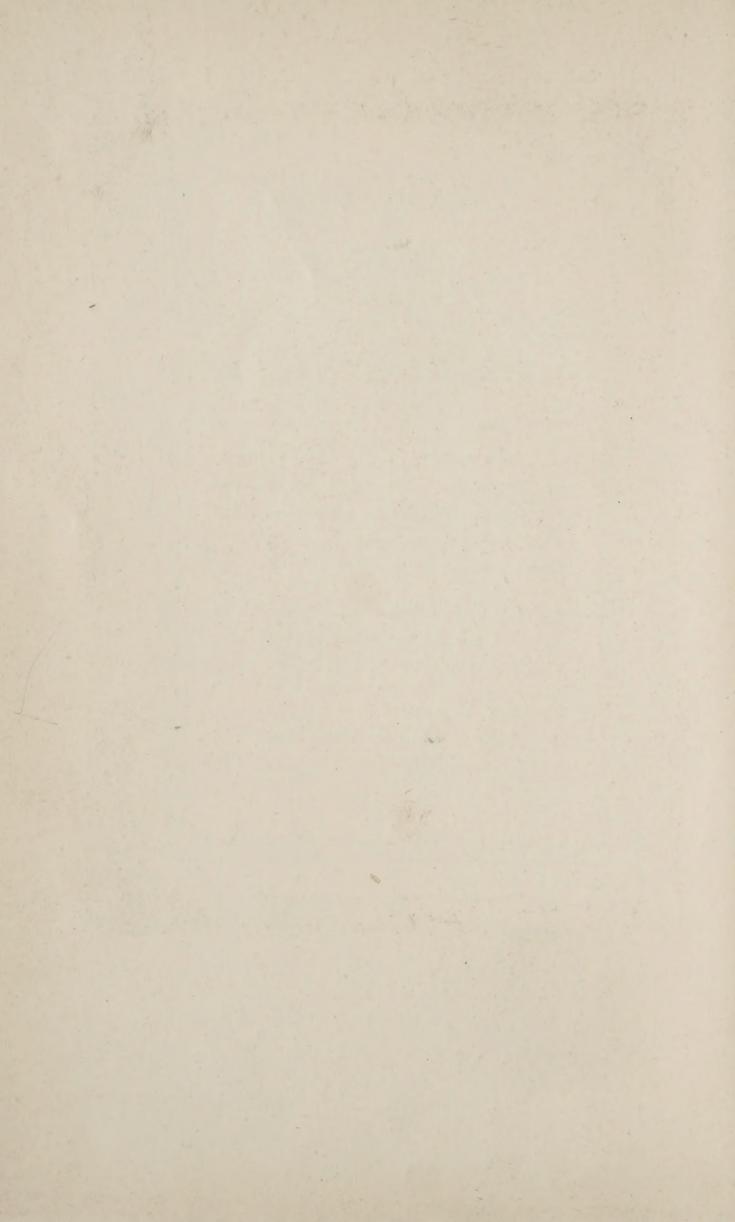


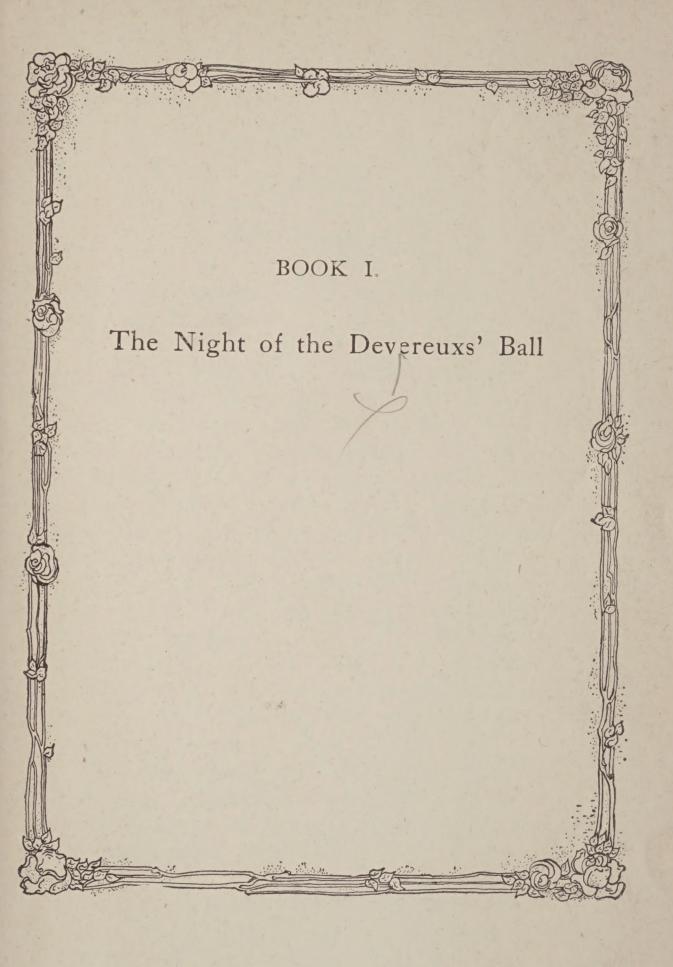














## CHAPTER I

## THE TWO TOMMIES

"I FIND nothing dull, Henry," said Miss Vyse, "in watching these young people enjoy themselves while I sit by inactive. I like to watch their little ways. They do not change greatly—the ways, I mean. They were the same when we were employing them. The way of a man with a maid! Who was it said that was one of the three indefinables? It seems to me very simple and unvarying. It is a game with rules."

Major Winfield leaned back in his arm-chair with a little chuckle, and he put the finger-tips of his two

hands neatly together, nodding his white head.

"Quite right, Sophia!" said he. "It is only when you replace the maid that the rules are torn up. The way of a man with a woman! Aye, that's one of the indefinables if you like! Is it not so, Arabella?" he asked, turning to the other woman, a handsome old woman with a high nose and arched eyebrows and

pretty pink cheeks.

"Eh, what, what?" said Mrs. Crowley, starting from her doze. "Who said I was nodding?" she demanded truculently. "I was not. I was immersed in thought. You were always so sudden, Henry! I should have married you if you had not burst upon me like a—a bomb-shell with your proposal. What were you and Sophia talking about?—some poor soul's lack of character, I'll wager."

"You are very unkind, Arabella!" said Miss Vyse in a hurt tone. "I never gossip, never! As you know,

Arabella! We were speaking of the dancers."

"Well, I hope you found something pleasant to say about them," said Mrs. Crowley. "I shouldn't. Heaven be praised that we had no such vulgar exhibitions in our day, my dear. Dancing was an art, then. It taught young people to move gracefully. Does this? Look at that puppy dancing with my niece Sibyl Eliot! He is holding her right hand straight up in the air over his head as if he were trying to reach the chandelier. What should we, in our day, have thought of clasping each other tightly to our bosoms and sliding about the floor in this sickeningly languid fashion? I tell you this modern American dancing should be checked by law!"

"'American'?" criticised Miss Vyse weakly.

"Certainly, American!" said the other woman. "Do English people dance like this? Not at all! French? German? Not at all, my dear. It is purely American. I say it with all proper shame. Ah, there is that pretty little Mrs. Hartwell!"

"Poor dear!" interrupted Miss Vyse, shaking a melancholy head. The other woman looked up quickly.

"What do you mean?" she demanded. "Why do

you say 'poor dear'?"

"I do not think she is happy with her husband,"

said old Miss Vyse.

"Sophia," said Mrs. Crowley, "I am not, as a rule, a gossip or a scandal-monger, but in this case I must ask you to explain. I have a reason for wishing to know."

"But, my dear!" protested Miss Vyse, "I have

nothing to tell. I know nothing about her. I called upon Mrs. Hartwell the other day, and somehow we fell to talking upon serious topics, and quite suddenly she burst into tears, saying that she was very unhappy and giving me a vague impression that her husband did not understand her."

"I seem to have heard that sentiment before," observed Major Winfield from the depths of his armchair; but Mrs. Crowley held up a hand to stop him.

"Yes? Yes?" she said. "Go on! What then? Her husband did not understand her, but some one else did."

"Oh!" objected Miss Vyse. "I do not think Mrs. Hartwell went quite so far as to say that, though I gathered—well, I judged that her husband was not quite all her trouble."

"One's husband so seldom is!" nodded Major

Winfield.

"Be quiet, Henry!" said Mrs. Crowley. "And

what then, Sophia?"

"Why—that was all," said the harassed Miss Vyse.

"That was quite all. She told me nothing definite, you understand. Yes, that was all. Tommy Carteret—old Tommy—came in just then, and I went away."

"A-a-ah!" said Mrs. Crowley slowly, and she stared

out across the room for a long time quite silent.

"I thought so!" she said at last, as if to herself.

"What was it you thought, Arabella?" inquired Miss Vyse politely.

"Nothing, my dear, nothing!" said the other woman.

"Did I speak? Nothing at all."

Devereux, their host, came hurrying past just then, and paused a moment, smiling hospitably.

"Ah, the three cronies!" he said with a little laugh.

"Helen told me you were here, all of you, but I've not yet had a chance to hunt you up. Helen keeps one so hard at it looking after these young girls who aren't properly being looked after by other men. I don't like giving parties. It is a great bore. Now, if this were some other chap's party I might be sitting here at peace talking to you instead of telling unattractive school-girls one by one that they're making the hit of the season. By the way, Mrs. Crowley, I have my eye on a jade snuff-bottle—I'm not saying where it's to be found—which I am going to buy to-morrow. You will turn green with envy when you see it."

Mrs. Crowley emitted a pleased little cackle.

"Yes, I know," she said. "I bought it this morning, at Yamanahka's. They told me you had been admiring it. It will be my finest, I think."

"You—bought it!" cried the outraged Devereux. "Well, I call that low, low! From this time on all is over between us. I feel a sudden dislike for you." He broke off, looking toward the door of the ball-room.

"Ah, there come Tommy Carteret and his father!" he said. "I must speak to Tommy about a horse." He looked back threateningly at the delighted Mrs. Crowley.

"I shall be even with you, yet, in the matter of that snuff-bottle," he said. "The blow is too great to suffer in silence."

Major Winfield laughed gently as the other man hastened away, and he turned his head to look toward the door where the two late comers stood, searching the room for their hostess.

"Tommy Carteret and his father," he repeated. "Why does every one instinctively say that—every one, that is, save us oldsters who have known old Tommy

all our lives? Why not 'Tommy Carteret and his son'?"

"The reason is not so far to seek, I should think," said Mrs. Crowley, watching the three men by the doorway. "Young Tommy's a man—or has all the ingredients of one, waiting for the final combination. Oh, yes, very much a man! Young Tommy will do something extraordinarily big and fine, one day. You watch! Old Tommy is—Ah, well, old Tommy is Tommy. You know."

"And yet, Arabella—" said Major Winfield from the depths of his chair, and, with the words, went a little half-chuckle which brought a flush to the old woman's face. "And yet—"

"Oh, yes!" said old Mrs. Crowley quite simply, "I loved him. All of us did, I fancy. I'm not certain that I don't love him now, in a sort of withered roseleaf fashion. I came very near marrying him, once, nearer than I came to marrying you, Henry."

"I wonder," said little Miss Vyse with a tremulous smile at the corners of her faded lips, "I wonder how many women, old and young, have little keepsakes—little souvenirs—recalling Tommy Carteret, hidden somewhere away in their inmost treasuries?"

"And their inmost hearts," nodded Major Winfield soberly.

"More than one cares to think of, my dear," said Mrs. Crowley, and her eyes still clung to the old beau who lounged gracefully by the doorway of the ball-room chatting with his son and with his host.

"There is something," she said after a pause, "very appealing about Tommy—old Tommy, something that no woman can resist. I say 'woman' for I think he was

never a man's man. Am I right, Henry?" Major Winfield nodded from his chair.

"A bit—weak," he said.

"Exactly that!" said the woman. "Weak. is a prevalent notion that women are attracted by strong men. I am an old woman, and I have kept my eyes open. I know better. Strong men may inspire a sort of passion in women, and undoubtedly they inspire admiration, but it is the man who is, as Henry says, a bit weak—with a certain sweet appealing weakness whom a woman most instinctively loves. It is the maternal in us. We want to mother such a man. He tells each of us that she alone, out of all the world, really understands him, and we believe the wretch. Oh, yes, Tommy is the sort we pour out our tenderness upon-we fools!"

"I wonder," said Major Winfield speculatively, "who is pouring out her tenderness upon Tommy at

present."

"Oh!" said little Miss Vyse in a half-shocked tone, "Oh, no one, I think! I think Tommy has given up all that—that sort of thing, long since. Of course, every one likes him, and he goes everywhere, but I fancy he thinks it time to look back upon his loveaffairs like the rest of us, Henry."

But Major Winfield's gaze was fixed upon the face of the other woman, and it seemed as if he persisted in directing his question to her. Mrs. Crowley's eyes at length met his, but they were quite blank and ex-

pressionless.

"I should think that what Sophia says is perfectly true," she said, and her voice was as expressionless as her eyes.

"Quite so!" murmured the man. "Quite so!"

"I have often wondered why Tommy married Adela Staunton. They seemed to me hardly—congenial. Yes, that is the word, I think, hardly congenial."

"He didn't marry her," said the other woman with a hint of sharpness. "She married him. Adela Staunton was a very managing woman—just the woman for Tommy to marry. She managed him admirably while she lived. Young Tommy owes most of his good qualities to her, and he has more good qualities than any other boy I know. I am going to marry him to my niece Sibyl Eliot."

"The contracting parties being willing?" queried

Major Winfield.

"The contracting parties are just beginning to take notice. I must see that Tommy has a half-hour with her this evening. She is looking well. He has been in London for the past two months, and Sibyl should appeal to him after those English girls—even if they are better bred than ours."

"Old Tommy is coming here to speak to us," said Miss Vyse suddenly, and sat up in her chair with a

quick breath.

The man they had been discussing left the two by the doorway, and came directly across to the corner where his three old friends sat. He did not walk like a man past fifty, but with a certain easy grace, a certain jaunty youthfulness. And, in spite of his white hair and the little white moustache turned sharply up at the points, his face was young also. Age had touched him lightly. He had always been an unusually handsome man with that extreme physical beauty which is commonly accompanied by a certain weakness of char-

acter and by rather moderate mental gifts—Providence is seldom sweepingly generous—and this beauty he had preserved with as much care as any woman—albeit

he was not a vain man as men go.

"The three cronies!" he said, as Devereux had said before him, but with a little, pleased affectionate laugh which was quite his own. "I've not seen you, Arabella, nor you, Henry, for half a moon. I did see you, Sophia, the other day at the Hart-I forget at whose house, but you despicably got up and went away as soon as I arrived. That was not nice of you, Sophia. I went home and wept." He laughed again, half mockingly, looking into their three faces, and it was easy to see how old Tommy Carteret had been enabled to walk down life's lane upon a red carpet of women's hearts. Something lovable breathed from him, something very sweet and boyish and, as Mrs. Crowley had said, appealing. A few people have always about them, in great store, that wholly indescribable quality which, for want of a word, we call personal magnetism. Old Tommy Carteret had more than his share of it-far more.

The orchestra from its balcony at the far end of the room began to play an old-time waltz, a quaint old forgotten old tune of thirty years gone by. Tommy Carteret straightened suddenly, and his eyes caught Mrs. Crowley's eyes and held them.

"Our waltz, Arabella!" said old Tommy Carteret. "As God lives, our waltz! Come, we must dance it once more. What are you waiting for? Come!"

Mrs. Crowley rose slowly to her feet, and her cheeks were pink.

"I am an old woman, Tommy," said she, "and part of the time I walk with a stick, but that is our waltz,

and I will try. No one shall ever say that Arabella Crowley did not try."

She tried, and it was no mean attempt, but after a few turns she came to a ponderous halt outside the circle of dancers.

"No, Tommy," said she between a laugh and a groan, "no, it is thirty years too late, and I carry thirty pounds too much about with me. I'm afraid we cannot manage."

"Nonsense, Arabella!" said the old beau. "You dance like a flower in the breeze—as you always did. Who should remember if not I? In a moment the

step will come to you."

"Ah, Tommy," said the woman, "you are a dear lad! You flatter like—like yourself, Tommy. Who should remember if not I? But my poor old knees are knocking together, and my rheumatism is the devil, to-night. How the ills of the flesh stand away from you, lad! The gods have loved you well—the gods and some others. Come! there is a little cushioned alcove yonder to the left. Come and talk to me. We see so little of you in these years, we who have grown old while you stood still! We've had to make way for the young and pretty ones. You've always demanded beauty, have you not, Tommy?—and got it."

But as they turned they came face to face with two people who were walking slowly down one side of the ball-room, and Arabella Crowley felt the man's arm stiffen and twitch under her hand. The two people were the pretty little Mrs. Hartwell and her husband, a square man with high, wide shoulders and a square face and a projecting under lip. The habitual and deeply scored creases in his forehead had formed an indented cross exactly in the centre of it. People who

forgot his name always spoke of him as the man with the cross on his forehead.

Little Mrs. Hartwell made as if she would pass on with only a faint smile of greeting, but her husband halted to speak to Mrs. Crowley, whom he liked for a certain trenchant and uncompromising habit of speech which she had. She was at times a rather fierce old woman, and, as Hartwell had once said to Major Winfield, her mental processes were distinctly those of a man, though she was by no means masculine in appearance or manner.

"I hear you cut in ahead of Devereux in the purchase of a jade snuff-bottle," he said. "I was glad to hear it. It'll teach him not to vacillate the next time he sees something he likes. Devereux's quite low in his mind about it. You must show me the bottle, one day. I've a few good bits of jade myself."

Mrs. Crowley smiled civilly, and made some sort of mechanical response, but she was not listening. She was watching little Mrs. Hartwell and old Tommy Carteret. She had, in the beginning, noted the other woman's evident desire to avoid speaking, and she noted, further, that her manner in greeting Carteret was not at all that of an ordinary acquaintance; that she did not politely smile and say she was glad to see him, or utter any other conventional phrase, but only looked steadily up into his face for some time, quite silent, with wide, grave eyes. Then Hartwell turned to the elder man and shook his hand cordially.

"What has become of you, of late?" he demanded. "We see nothing of you at our house, any more. That's not doing quite the right thing by us, is it? We rely upon you young men to keep us abreast of the world, socially." He paused a moment to laugh at his silly

little witticism, and Mrs. Crowley saw something shift and darken in Anne Hartwell's eyes, and saw the corners of old Tommy Carteret's mouth twitch in a peculiar fashion which she had known well. The peculiar twitch meant that old Tommy was engaged in villainy, and that he was finding himself extremely successful. In a less handsome man, it must have been called a smirk.

"I'm a good bit of a hermit, these days," he said with his apologetic, engaging smile. "I find it hard to tear myself away from my book and my pipe. I'm afraid I'm growing old."

Tommy Carteret with a book and a pipe! Mrs. Crowley heard the younger woman make a sudden smothered gasp, and she frowned instinctively as at a card badly played. Tommy always would embroider too much. He would never let success alone.

"Well," said Hartwell, "you must make an exception in our case. We're too old friends to be neglected so. Good night! Yes, we're off. Anne is not feeling her best, so I shall drop her at home and go on to my club. I've a committee meeting which will keep me for two or three hours. Good night! Congratulations again over the snuff-bottle, Mrs. Crowley."

But again Arabella Crowley did not listen; she watched the other two people, and thought she saw Tommy Carteret's eyebrows rise slightly and little Anne Hartwell make something like the shadow of a nod.

Then, when the Hartwells had gone, she pressed old Tommy onward toward the little draped and cushioned alcove beyond, and having at last cornered him, as it were, sat herself down to do battle.

"That is a very pretty little woman," she began, "that Mrs. Hartwell. I knew her mother."

"Yes?" said old Tommy politely. He had the air of one absorbed in thought but determined to be civil.

"Very pretty," said she, "and, as is often the case,

unhappy."

Old Tommy looked up swiftly with an involuntary twitching of the hands. His face he had long since

schooled to immobility.

"I don't think I—quite understand, my dear," said he. "Mrs. Hartwell unhappy? Dear me, that is very, very sad! Such a charming little woman, too. She has been—er, confiding in you, I take it?" And for just an instant a gleam of interest escaped repression in old Tommy's eye, and one hand, because it might not be still, fumbled at his waistcoat.

"Oh, dear me, no!" said Arabella Crowley and, with a sort of bitter amusement, watched the man's deep breath of relief. "Oh, no! I hardly know her. But an old woman, Tommy, has eyes all round and round her head—eyes within and without like the biblical creature, I forget what its name was, and she sees things go on. I've watched and I'm sorry for that poor little woman. I'm sorry for everybody concerned, because, one day, there will be a very bad smash-up. I know Hartwell. He's a hard man, Tommy, hard as nails. And I know what sort of woman the little wife is—I know her type. It's the tragic type. She has no sense of humour. Oh, yes! there will be a very bad smash-up, one day."

Old Tommy Carteret shifted uneasily in his seat.

"But, my dear Arabella," he said after a short pause, "you speak in parables. This all sounds very serious and melodramatic, but you forget that you have not told me the source of Mrs. Hartwell's unhappiness. I am rather at a loss."

"Oh, it's another man!" said she. "Didn't I say that? It's another man who has convinced the poor little fool that her husband—who is a good sort in his way, though hard—does not understand or appreciate her, but that he himself does. It is quite the common old story, you see. So few of us have any true inventive power."

Old Tommy Carteret stared frowning out over the lighted ball-room, and that restless hand ever fumbled at the buttons of his waistcoat.

"How do you—know all this?" he asked presently. "You say Mrs. Hartwell has not been confiding in you."

"Oh, I have my ways, Tommy!" nodded the woman. "I have my devious ways." And Tommy Carteret, who was beginning to enjoy himself, now that there seemed no pitfalls in the way, sat back among his cushions and laughed a pleased little chuckling laugh.

"The old Arabella!" he said laughing. "Oh, my

dear, my dear!"

"Yes, Tommy," she sighed. "Three and fifty, but

it is unkind of you to drag it out into the light."

"You're wilfully misunderstanding," he said reproachfully. "I didn't mean 'old' in that sense. I mean the old Arabella in the sense of the Arabella who used to—used to dance with me, and ride with me, and sit with me in a certain rose arbour that I shall never forget, and—and—Dear child, do you remember a pink-sprigged muslin frock with apple-green ribbons? Do you? Tell the truth! I was thinking of it and of a number of things it brought to mind, only last night."

Arabella Crowley shook her white head.

"Maybe I do and maybe I don't, Tommy," said she. "That's beside the question. I can think, just now,

of nothing but that poor, little pretty Hartwell woman who's on the high-road to so much trouble. Her face haunts me." She leaned confidentially toward her vis-à-vis and lowered her voice a bit as if she were

afraid of being overheard.

"I wish, Tommy," she said, "that I had that man here, now, where you are sitting, that man who is dragging Anne Hartwell into danger." And again, with a sort of bitter amusement, she watched the sudden strain which old Tommy put upon himself to remain immobile. "I'd so like to warn him!"

"Ah!" said Carteret easily. "Little Mrs. Hartwell

has a friend in you, I see."

"No—no," she hesitated. "No, I think it is hardly that. I doubt whether I feel much personal interest in Anne Hartwell. It's only—only that the thing seems such a mistake. This man can't know. He can't have realised what a mistake it is. There are women who are as naturally and safely intrigante as if that sort of thing were a profession with them. Anne Hartwell, as I've said before, is fatally different. She is naturally puritan. She'll make a hideous tragedy out of this affair, and her husband will aid and abet her. Oh, the man can't realise what he's getting into! There are so many other women about. Why doesn't he choose one of the others? I'm afraid for him, Tommy. I'm afraid for both of them."

But once more Tommy Carteret sat back among his cushions and laughed.

"What a Cassandra it is, to-night, my dear!" he mocked. "Come, come, Arabella! You're taking it all much too seriously. I dare say there's no such affair as you hint at. I dare say your little Mrs. Hartwell has a headache and therefore looks sad, and

straightway you manufacture tragedies for her. For shame, Arabella!"

Old Mrs. Crowley drew a little sigh, shaking her head slowly, and for a space she was silent. Then—"I should like to have warned him," she said, and was silent again.

Then presently Tommy Carteret rose to his feet. He was half frowning—a petulant, boyish frown—half laughing. His face was the face of a spoiled child, childen but wilful still, and somehow lovable in its very wilfulness.

"Shall I take you back to the others, Arabella, dear?" he asked. "I am sorry, but I must be leaving early. I—have a man to see at my club."

Arabella Crowley rose beside him white-faced, and

caught swiftly at his arm with a shaking hand.

"Ah, no, no, Tommy! No!" she cried in a whisper. "You mustn't go! I'm—I'm afraid, Tommy. Don't go this time. My old bones presage danger—disaster. Tommy, I've—loved you well and been a good—friend to you. Don't go to-night."

The masks were off. Old Tommy Carteret drew a long breath, looking into the woman's eyes, and, for a moment, something like fear came over him; but in

another moment he laughed again.

"Cassandra!" said he. "Dear, dear Cassandra!" And it was still the spoiled child, childen but wilful, and somehow lovable in its wilfulness. He led her back across the ball-room to where little Miss Vyse and Major Winfield still sat in their corner, and in all the way she spoke but once.

"'Whom the gods would destroy,' Tommy," she said,
"'they first make mad." But it is doubtful whether old
Tommy Carteret even heard her. There was a little,

twitching, absent smile beginning to grow at the corners of his lips, and, as he bowed his farewells and moved toward the door of the ball-room it seemed as if his buoyant walk had taken on an extra youthfulness.

## CHAPTER II

## SIBYL

Now, when old Tommy Carteret left his host near the door of the ball-room and crossed to the far corner where his three old friends were seated, young Tommy also parted with that busy and harassed gentleman and, steering a course opposite to that pursued by his

sire, embarked upon a quest of his own.

Young Tommy was considered good to look upon. He had little or none of his father's extraordinary personal beauty, but his appearance left no doubt of the fact that he was, as Arabella Crowley had said, a man. He had the advantage over old Tommy of something more than an inch in height, being quite six feet in his shoes, and he walked and moved with that curious swinging half-swagger which is common to all men who are athletes. Old Tommy had disproportionately large, dark, and appealing eyes. Young Tommy's eyes were neither large nor dark, but a very keen grey, deep-set under straight brows, and oddly steady for one of his years. No one up to this time had ever spoken of them as appealing.

He had a good nose, larger by quite a bit than old Tommy's, and beaked, whereas old Tommy's was straight and Greek. And further, he had a square, jutting chin—his mother's chin—under a mouth curiously at variance with it. In repose he looked a rather stern and uncompromising young man, but when he spoke

or smiled all his face warmed and softened and relaxed, and became oddly lovable. It was his one outward likeness to his father—that and the voice. They had

voices amazingly alike.

He skirted one side of the ball-room, keeping close to the wall, out of the way of the dancers, for a waltz was in progress, and looking intently over the heads of the crowd for a certain head which he knew must be flamingly conspicuous by reason of the colour God had given it. He found the head almost at once, his good angel being for the moment in attendance, and, a lane chancing to open through the crush just then, the girl to whom the flaming head belonged caught sight of young Tommy almost at the same instant, and gave him a vigorous nod of surprise and pleasure, and waved the hand which lay on her partner's shoulder. Then, after a moment, young Tommy saw her speak to the man with whom she was dancing, and the two came across the room to him, dodging, as best they might, the dancers who swung across their way.

"Tommy!" said the girl, and seized both of young Tommy's hands in hers. "Tommy! but I'm glad to see you! I didn't know you'd returned. I thought you were still in London. I was asking Jimmy Rogers about you, only this evening. He said he'd had a letter from you, and that you had decided to marry a flower-girl whom you had met in Piccadilly Circus, and settle down to a country life in Grosvenor Square."

"Isn't Jimmy a beautiful liar?" said young Tommy, full of respectful admiration. "Fancy thinking that all out yourself! I got in only two days ago, on the Deutschland, or I should have looked you up, Sibyl, before now. I was hoping you'd be here. I say, may I have the next dance?"

Miss Eliot made a face.

"Oh, it's gone!" she said. "Some creature has it. But I'll tell you, Tommy! You dash up the moment this dance is finished, and I'll run away with you. We'll escape the creature."

"Hooray!" said young Tommy. "Sibyl, you're a sport! I know the very place to go. It's on one of the Lombard lakes. There's an island there—"

"Now, look here!" said the other man. "I refuse to be a party to this. Tommy, you have no morals at all, and Sibyl hasn't either. I'm ashamed of you."

"Oh, well, then," said Miss Eliot, "we won't go to Tommy's island! I didn't mean just that sort of running away, Tommy, though I'm not saying that it hasn't its points. We'll go up on the roof-garden thing. There is one, you know. The stair is on the balcony outside the long open windows yonder. Be waiting for me near that window, Tommy, and we'll make a dash for life. My keeper? Oh, she won't mind! I'm not in charge of Aunt Arabella Crowley. I'm with the Harrisons."

She whirled off again with a parting wave of her hand, and young Tommy Carteret made his way slowly round the room to the row of French windows which opened upon a long flower-banked balcony. As he went, and as he stood waiting beside one of the open windows, he was vaguely conscious of a very pleasant, and rather novel, inward excitement, a sort of eager, expectant thrill quite beyond his natural content at being once more at home, among the good home things and home people. He realised that he was much more pleased to see Sibyl Eliot again than he could have expected to be. The first sight of her red hair, whirling about among the crowd of dancers,

had come to him with a queer little shock, which somewhat astonished him now that he had time to think it over.

"Sib's a dear old girl!" he said to himself, smiling out over the moving throng. But that didn't seem quite to express it, and, although young Tommy was a lad not in the least given to introspection, he began a half-puzzled self-examination by way of finding out

just what Sib was.

He had always taken her so much for granted. She had always been such an extraordinarily satisfactory pal, easy enough to leave, but delightful to come back to. He and she had had so many magnificent larks together. Now, suddenly, for some unknown reason, the situation had quite altered, and young Tommy rather resented it, albeit conscious of that very pleasant and rather novel inward excitement.

The waltz ceased, there was a near-by flurry of petticoats, and a young person with red hair pounced violently upon Tommy Carteret and dragged him through the nearest window, out upon the flower-banked balcony.

"Now," said Miss Eliot, when they were hidden in the gloom, "we're safe. The creature will never find us. Let's go up top. There's more room. Here

is the stair, to the left. Up with you."

Now the Devereuxs, finding themselves, a few years before this, saddled with a flat-roofed, battlemented atrocity of an imitation gothic castle, had wisely made good out of evil by turning this flat roof into a garden, and projecting from the rear windows of the ball-room, on the top story, a broad balcony, from which a bit of a stair led up to the house-top. There were palms and magnolias and bays and many sorts of potted

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plants set about to make as many secluded nooks as possible, and the place was dimly lighted by orange-coloured paper lanterns. The out-of-door garden illusion was further maintained by the trees of the park across the avenue.

"Not bad, Tommy!" said Miss Eliot. "What?"

"Not in the least bad!" said young Tommy
Carteret. "By Jove, it's something like!" He leaned
his elbows upon the parapet at the front of the house
and looked down into the asphalted stretch of the avenue below, where rubber-tyred hansoms and broughams rolled past, the hooves of their horses clicking
sharply, and an occasional motor-car charged along,
blaring its horn as it approached a side street. Then,
somehow, his eyes, of their own accord, wandered
from the street below to the girl who leaned over the
parapet beside him, almost touching his shoulder,
and he fell to thinking how curiously effective an orange
light is upon red hair. It is humanly possible that
Miss Eliot may have thought it all out before him.

She looked up, after a little time, and met his eyes, and it may be that a tiny spark of that strange thing which had so newly come to young Tommy got from his eyes into hers and so downward, for, even in the dim half-darkness, she flushed, all at once, and looked away. And young Tommy caught his breath.

"Glad to be at home again, Tommy?" she asked, gently, for it seemed that the younger Carteret was

pledged to a life-long silence.

"Glad?" said young Tommy explosively. "Glad?

—By Jove I—I—I say, you know I'm—I'm not a bit clever——"

"Oh, our modest, modest Thomas!" said Miss Eliot.

"And so," said young Tommy, "I can't say it, you know. What? But I am glad. I was never so glad in my life. I can't see just why any silly ass wants to go away from his home, anyhow. Not alone, that is."

"Oh?" said Miss Eliot encouragingly.

"Not alone, you know," said young Tommy, and

stuck fast again.

"And you're—you're not going to marry the flower-girl from Piccadilly Circus?" she demanded. Young Tommy laughed.

"Nor anybody?"

"'Bject!" said young Tommy Carteret.

"I mean anybody over there—any English girls?"

corrected the examining attorney.

"Oh, English girls be hanged!" said young Tommy rudely. "I don't want ever to see any more of them," he said. "I don't want anything, but—I don't—I just want to stop here!" said he.

The girl was standing before him, smiling up into his face, and young Tommy's world began to go round

slowly like a Catharine wheel when it starts.

"By Jove, Sib," said he, "you're a—you're a— most uncommon dear!" He put out his two hands and took her by the arms as she stood there; but, at the warm, soft touch, his hands dropped suddenly, and he was quite bereft of speech, so that he only stared with a little, odd nervous laugh which he could not check.

Miss Eliot turned slowly away, and sat down upon a near-by bench, and Tommy Carteret managed somehow to drop down beside her. To his soul he was fiercely berating himself for a half-grown, tonguetied ass, and various other things, mostly unprintable. But his throat was held in a mighty grip, and he could not speak in the face of this overwhelming thing which had come to him. You see, falling in love with people had happened never to come in young Tommy's way. He had never been that sort.

"Well, that's just what I—what we want you to do," said the girl. "Just stop here. You're away far too much, Tommy. We have you only in spots, and we want you all the time. You're so very nice to play with!" she added hastily, lest she might have seemed too encouraging.

"Oh!" said young Tommy, and there was quite a

pause.

"Tell me things," said Sibyl Eliot finally. "Where have you been, and what have you done in all these three months?"

"Oh, nothing much!" said he. He could speak just like a human being now on this safe ground. "The usual sort of thing that one does in England," he said. "I wasn't much in town, only a fortnight, at the last, for the theatres. There were some good plays, the musical ones in particular at the 'Gaiety,' and at 'Daly's,' and at 'The Prince of Wales.' We shall have them here next winter, I expect. I was a fool to spend all those weeks in England. Think of where I might have been!"

"The South?" she said.

"Yes," said Tommy. "Seville and Granada—Palermo—Capri—Ragusa—Oh, such a heap of places where it's good to be!"

"And your island place that we were going to run

away to, a few minutes ago!" insisted the girl.

"Rather!" said Tommy. "It's Isola Madre, you know, in Lago Maggiore."

"No," said she, shaking her head, "there is another

one I'd rather go to—that is, if you don't mind?" she deprecated.

"Not at all," said Tommy Carteret generously.

"Not at all. Go as far as you like."

"Well, then, I'll tell you," she said.—"Isn't it nice that we like our island places so, Tommy?—I'll tell you about my island."

"Ours!" said Tommy Carteret.

"Ours!" said she. "It's an Azore. Once when we were going from New York to Naples, Gib. way,-I was with Aunt Arabella and some people—we ran very close along the southern coast of the Azores, because the captain's wife, who was on board by special permission, had never seen them. We reached the first islands early one morning and passed them, and then, in the evening of that day—such a beautiful, warm spring evening, Tommy!—we steamed past Pico. You know, don't you! It was on the edge of dark, and there were tiny, tiny points of yellow light that were windows, here and there, low by the shore, and the mountain, that beautiful wooded cone of a mountain, towered up, green-black, above them against the sky that was all streaks of crimson and orange and dun and black, where the sun had gone down. There were mists about the mountain, Tommy, clouds and veils of mist, blue-white, and they changed and curled and lifted as we slipped past. Ah, it was so unspeakably beautiful, and I'm telling it so badly! Why am I not a literary person who can describe things? The peak of the mountain was above those curling mists, Tommy, black against the red sky, and there was one tiny pin-point of yellow light there. Somebody was on the summit. Probably, somebody lives there. And, oh, I wanted to be the somebody, one of two someSIBYL 27

bodies! If you'd been on our ship that evening I'd have dared you to jump overboard and swim with me to Pico.

"What a life! Free and alone on a mountain-top in a warm southern sea. Do you get it at all? Do you get the gipsy feeling of it? Do I tell it so badly that it all sounds absurd? I've never forgotten that hour sailing past Pico. It was all my old fairy books brought back to me, all the silly sentimental dreams I've ever dreamed put together—just an island mountain, black and mist-wreathed against a red sky!"

"Sib, Sib!" said young Tommy Carteret, and leaned forward and sidewise in his seat to stare into the girl's face. She was breathing quickly, and her eyes were wide and very dark in the half-light, and her lips were apart in an odd little smile that Tommy did not

know.

"Sib!" he said again. "Why—Sib. I—didn't know. I didn't know you—cared about that—sort of thing. Why, Sib, we're just a—pair of gipsies together! Why didn't I know?"

But Miss Eliot pulled herself up with a little shiver.

"You're hurting my hand, Tommy, dear," she said, and young Tommy hastily dropped the injured member. He had been quite unconscious of holding it.

"I'm a sentimental fool, Tommy," pursued Miss Eliot. "I slipped into all that before I—knew. I

sha'n't do it again."

"But Sib," said he, "I'm a sentimental fool, too. So why not? Let's sneak down the back way, Sib, and go to Pico."

The girl rose, laughing a bit nervously.

"We'll sneak back to that ball-room at once," she declared. "We've been too long away." But she

turned to him once more in the light of the paper lanterns and looked up into his face, holding him by the coat.

"It's good to have you at home again, Tommy," she said gently. "Don't go away again for a long time. We want you to play with. And—come soon to see me."

"May I come to-morrow?" demanded young Tommy promptly.

"It is quite possible that I may be at home," ad-

mitted Miss Eliot.

"Sib!" said young Tommy, under his breath, staring down into her eyes, "Sib!" and for the second time that evening Miss Eliot flushed and looked away, while the younger Carteret's world broke from its moorings, and began to go slowly round like a Catharine wheel.

## CHAPTER III

## CARTERET NEVER FAILED CARTERET

At the open window below, an apparently demented young man seized upon Miss Eliot, and, after directing glances of haughty rebuke at Tommy Carteret, bore his prize away to where a two-step was being executed. Tommy Carteret grinned and made his way down the ball-room, where he fell in with Arabella Crowley and a plate of sandwiches.

"You are a very rude young man," said Mrs. Crowley, beaming affectionately upon him. "You should have spoken to me first and to my niece afterward."

"Now don't be nasty to me, Aunt Arabella," said young Tommy—he had always called her Aunt Arabella for no reason whatever—"because I am feeling in particularly good spirits, and I don't want them tampered with. *Particularly* good spirits," he repeated.

Mrs. Crowley narrowed her keen old eyes for an

instant, and made room beside her.

"Sit down here," she said, "and tell me how you

find Sibyl."

"Sibyl," said young Tommy, flushing a bit, "Sibyl is—Sibyl—well, there aren't words for Sibyl!—Why didn't I ever know it before?" he demanded, frowning fiercely. Arabella Crowley cackled over her caviar sandwich.

"The point is," she observed, "that you know it now. She's a very dear girl, Tommy."

"Do you think I'll dispute that?" cried young Tommy. "I tell you there aren't words for her!"

"How very young you are, child!" commented Arabella Crowley. "Let me see! Five-and-twenty?"

"Six," said Tommy briefly.

"And Sibyl's just turned twenty," pursued the old woman. "That is a very good difference. I think she has missed you, Tommy, while you were away. When do you leave us again?"

"I don't leave you," said young Tommy Carteret with some decision. "I've knocked about quite enough.

I'm going to settle down."

Mrs. Crowley cackled again, but she patted the boy's

hand fondly and nodded at him.

"I don't mind telling you, Tommy," she said, "that I should be glad to see you and Sibyl grow to care for each other. Sibyl is a very lovely girl as well as a beautiful one, and you're the only young man in this set here whom I should care to see her marry. I think you could make her happy."

"D'you think I can ever make her care for me, though?" demanded young Tommy, suddenly attacked by miserable doubt. "I'm a—rotten bad love-maker,

you know. I-it has never been in my line."

"She will care for you, right enough, if you give her time," said old Mrs. Crowley. "And, when she does care, she will care very hard, Tommy. She has red hair."

"I wish I were sure," mourned young Tommy, still cast down. "A while ago, up on the housetop yonder, I—I thought—it seemed to me we were getting on swimmingly. Somehow I'm not so sure, now. I wish I knew. I wish——. You see, we've always been such good pals. That's a beast of a handicap, you know. She knows all my silly faults."

"I think she missed you while you were away," said old Mrs. Crowley again, nodding her white head.

"I wish I knew!" wailed young Tommy as if it were

an anthem.

Arabella Crowley sat looking at him in silence for some moments, and her face changed from its halftender amusement and became very grave and a bit anxious.

"Tommy," she said finally and halted, frowning uncertainly. "Tommy," she said again, "you may be very young in love matters. In fact, my dear, you are very, very young, but in some ways you're oddly grown-up. You and—and your father are very unlike. You're the steady, reliable one. He's the—he's different. You know."

Young Tommy laughed.

"You see, he never grew old. His hair turned white, but the rest of him's younger than I am."

"Exactly!" said Arabella Crowley, but she did not

smile in answer to his laugh.

"I've—been very fond of him, you know," she went on. "Almost all my life I've been fond of him. I narrowly escaped being your mother, Tommy. And so I —I'd like to do him a good turn if ever I could."

Young Tommy was watching her face now with a

little alert frown.

"Aah!" he said slowly. "Governor invading some-body's hearth-rug again? What? Don't you be alarmed about that, Aunt Arabella. The governor's careful. He won't come any croppers."

"Couldn't you—get him to go away somewhere, Tommy?" she begged. "Couldn't you get him up into the mountains?—Greenland's icy mountains or India's coral strand, or somewhere?—I don't think the air is good for him here. And—Tommy, everybody comes a cropper sometime, you know. You can go on half a lifetime, taking your fences blind, but one day you'll be rolled out." Young Tommy laughed aloud.

"Aunt Arabella," said he, "you ought to be sitting up over that door yonder. You're a raven, that's what you are. A Poe's raven." And the old woman tried

to smile in answer, but it was a wry smile.

"Aye, Tommy," she said. "I'm Cassandra to-night, and my bones quake oddly. There's something in the air. There's trouble gathering—or, maybe it is only a coming rain that has quickened my rheumatism. Run along and play, child! Don't listen to me—. All the same, I wish you'd get him away—I'm afraid."

"I'm off for home," said Tommy. "There won't be another chance at Sibyl, and I don't care about the rest of this. Where is the governor? I might take him

along with me."

"He's gone," said Arabella Crowley. "I think he said he was going to his club." She put a certain emphasis on the "said," and young Tommy laughed again.

"Good night, Aunt Arabella," said he, "good night! And don't you worry about the governor. He's an old hand."

He sought out his hostess and said good night to her, and was making his way out of the room when he came once more upon Miss Sibyl Eliot, convoyed this time by a little yellow, spectacled man of mild aspect.

"Going, Tommy?" she said. "Won't they let you stay out late? Never you mind. You'll grow." She turned to the little yellow man with a sudden expression

of concern.

"I've left my fan out on that balcony," she said. "A

big white fluffy fan. Could you get it before it is picked up by some one else? I'll wait here with Mr. Carteret." Then when the little yellow man had gone away, she said:

"Was I nasty, up on deck, Tommy?—About coming down so abruptly, I mean. Please, I'm sorry. I—thought I'd made a sort of fool of myself over that island of mine, and I was a bit angry with me. Be a dear Tommy, and understand."

"Oh, Sib!" said young Tommy Carteret in a sort of groan. "Oh, Sib! you're so very beautiful!" Miss Eliot went, all at once, pink, but it must have been with pleasure, for she smiled upon young Tommy quite divinely, and made not the slightest effort to contradict him.

"Now you are a dear Tommy!" she said. "Here comes that person with my silly fan. Good night, Tommy. Sweet dreams! And remember about tomorrow."

Young Tommy remembered her for a very long time as she looked to him just then—flushed a little, smiling divinely, the light behind her making a wonderful golden halo of her red hair.

He was going down the steps to the street before he realised that he had moved at all. A double row of coupés and broughams stood waiting along the kerb, and the carriage man deferentially called young Tommy by name and asked him what his number was, but Tommy shook his head and turned down the avenue on foot. He wanted air and space—a great deal of it, and freedom of movement, and time to think the fine, big, beautiful thoughts that came crowding into his head.

The sudden fears and misgivings which had attacked him while he was talking with Arabella Crowley were quite gone now. Had not Sibyl said, "You're a dear Tommy?"—and in their place abode a vague but glowing elation, a keen sense of something sweet and wonderful beyond words which suddenly had come into his life and was never again to leave him. He was not so foolish as to think that he had but to hold out his hand to Sibyl Eliot—to call to her and she would straightway come. He knew that this present tenderness of hers was no love in any real sense of the word, but he knew that in time he could make her care, and care infinitely. And the thought of Sibyl, Sibyl, loving such a worm as himself, filled him with a sort of vertigo, lifted him madly from the pavement.

What a silly empty waste his life had been, mourned young Tommy within himself. (This was at Fifty-ninth Street, where he was all for walking blindly through a cross-town surface car, so fine was his frenzy.) What a lonely, arid, meaningless expanse! (Mind you, he was six-and-twenty, the lamb!) To think of those wasted years, lost for always! Ah, but he'd make them up, he and Sib together! The larks they'd have—the places they'd go, jolly little out-of-the-way places that he had liked even when he was alone. To think of them with Sib there beside one!— And Sib's island, too, black-green against the sunset. He threw back his head with a little shaking laugh as he remembered Sib's telling about Pico.

"If you'd been on our ship that evening I'd have dared you to jump overboard and swim with me to Pico—" Why hadn't he been there? He tried to imagine standing beside a steamer's rail with Sib against his shoulder and the wind blowing Sib's splendid hair across her eyes—and a motor-car nearly brought his young life to a close. This was at Forty-second Street.

And so all down the long stretch of the Avenue his soul raved and shouted within him, picturing such a life as never was lived—for had there ever, within time's span, been a Sibyl?—beggaring heaven of its golden streets and its fabled delights to furnish forth the small particular heaven which was to compass one very young, very unworthy man named Carteret and one fairybook queen with red hair. He cut across Broadway at Twenty-third Street, and an apoplectic old gentleman whom he nearly upset cursed him painstakingly, but he did not know it. He strode with mighty steps and a threatening stick through the shabby garish lights of Fourteenth Street, and on into the quiet gloom of the lower Avenue, but his eyes were aloft and afar until at last the arch loomed dim before him, and he was in Washington Square.

The bells all over the city were striking twelve as he ran up the steps of the house where the Carterets had lived for half a century, and where he himself had been born, and old Parkins, grave and grey, let him in and

took his coat and hat.

"Governor in yet, Parkins?" demanded young Tommy.

"Not yet, Mr. Thomas," said old Parkins.

you have lights, sir?"

"Oh, yes!" said young Tommy. "Lights in the library and dining-room. I shall be up a long while, I think. You'd best fix things for the night, Parkins,

and turn in. The governor has his key."

"Thank you, sir, I shall be up for an hour yet, sir," said old Parkins as one who gently reproves, but Tommy was in the small particular heaven again, striding up and down the hall, with his hands in his pockets, and did not hear. He went into the big square dining-room, where the lights which Parkins had made were mirrored and multiplied on heavy centre-table and panelled walls, and he poured himself a long whiskey and water at the sideboard, for his walk had made him thirsty. He stood at the head of the table with his glass on high, and, out of the shadows at the far end of the room, gleamed dim to him a crown of hair, copperred; under it, eyes great and tender; lips that smiled divinely.

"God save the Queen!" said young Tommy Carteret in a new voice that his friends would not have known—not even Sibyl. It occurred to him that this was the first time he had ever drunk to a woman, save on a few very stately and formal occasions when the toast had meant nothing to him. He set down his glass upon the old mahogany and pulled up a near-by chair. That small particular heaven which gleamed so bravely aloft and ahead threw over its walls a rosy golden glow, and young Tommy sat within the glow, basking.

So sweet she was, so rich in all tenderness, so ineffably dear! What a child one moment and then, the next, by some sudden miracle, what a woman to pet and mother one! He set his elbows on the table before him and his chin in his two fists, and his eyes, turned alchemists in one evening, looked back upon the Sibyl of old days, transmuting girl to goddess, finding a thousand exquisite lovelinesses which he, swine of the gutter that he was, had passed by, blindly. How she should glorify these dark old rooms which had known no woman for twenty years! How sunshine should follow her into their dimmest corners! How Carteret House should wake to life and beauty!

Yonder she should sit, said young Tommy, in his

glow from Paradise, just across the table there, to pour him his morning coffee ..... What luck that old Tommy breakfasted in his own rooms! In one of those lacy, flowing morning things she'd be, with her splendid hair, that deep red hair so like to tawny sherry, in a big knot at the back of her neck, and her slim hands busy about the Carteret silver which had never known such hands in all its life-What silver had?

"Oh, Sib!" cried young Tommy in a sudden trembling ecstasy of love and tenderness, "Oh, Sib, you're so very beautiful!" And the goddess across the table, busy over the Carteret silver, flushed just as pink as if the words were new to her and not outworn with much repeating, and said, divinely smiling:

"You are a dear Tommy!"

It may have been an hour that he sat there, dreaming his radiant dreams, painting his rainbow pictures: time had no meaning to him. He was awakened at last by voices in the hall-Parkins's grave, gentle tones and his father's quicker ones so absurdly like his own. Then, in a moment, old Tommy looked in through the door.

"Ah, young 'un, still up?" he said. "I shall turn in, I think. Good night!" But young Tommy started up

in protest.

"No, wait a bit, governor!" he called. "Don't go to bed yet. I want company. I want—I want to make a night of it." He came out into the brighter light of the hall, smiling his foolish ecstatic smile, and caught the elder man by the shoulders, shaking him gently to and fro.

"Don't go to bed, Tommy!" he said again—they had an odd habit of calling each other Tommy-"I want you to celebrate with me. I want some one to talk to. I couldn't sleep if I should take Prussic acid.

Come and have a drink! Do you good!"

Old Tommy stirred a bit uneasily and seemed to hesitate. If the other had been less enwrapped with his own newly discovered happiness, he might have noticed that old Tommy looked oddly worn and drawn and nervous. But at last he laughed, shaking his head at his big son.

"Right, infant! Lead on! I was feeling just a bit seedy and had thought of bed, but if you need a listener, I'm your man. Yes, I will have a nip-just a wee nip." He crossed to the sideboard and took up the decanter of rye, scorning young Tommy's Scotch, and, if he had not kept his back turned, his son and heir might have been surprised to see that the "wee nip" was a glass full to the top. Old Tommy was commonly a most abstemious man.

"Aah!" he said with a long breath of satisfaction, turning back into the room. "That's better-Ineeded it. Now, young 'un, what's the news behind that silly grin of yours? To my experienced eye, it has the look of calf love. What?"

"Governor!" said young Tommy again, laying violent hands upon his parent, "governor, I'm going to settle down."

"The devil you are!" said old Tommy.

"The devil I am!" said his son. "No more wandering about, no more looking for trouble in far corners of Europe. Governor, I'm going to marry!"

"Ah! bringing your trouble nearer home, what?"

nodded the old beau.

"That is," conditioned young Tommy, "if the girl will have me."

"Ah now, it's well you thought of that!" said Carteret

senior. "You'd better ask her. They sometimes do. May I enquire who the lady is?"

Young Tommy went red and looked critically into

his glass.

"It's-well, it's Sibyl Eliot," he said, and the elder

man gave an exclamation of surprise.

"By Jove!" he cried, "I'd never thought of Sibyl Eliot. But, for that matter, I'd never thought of your marrying at all. One never realises that children grow up. Sibyl Eliot! Tommy, I'm not sure but you've more sense and taste than I've ever credited you with. Does the—er—lady know?"

"The lady does not," said young Tommy. "It—why, it came over me all in a—all in a sort of rush, you

know, to-night at that Devereux place."

"It sometimes does," nodded the other man.

"A queer sort of rush, you know," said young Tommy, still filled with wonder at the miracle. "Very peculiar. Oh, Lord, no! Sib doesn't guess it at all. What you laughing at? But I tell you, governor, I think—I rather think I can make it, with a bit of time. Sib likes me, I'll swear, and to-night she said—well, I'm sure she likes me. Think of it, will you? Sib liking me!"

"No accounting for their tastes, my dear boy," said the elder man. "They take up with queer lots at times. So you want to marry, eh? How old are you? Five—six—six-and-twenty. Six-and-twenty! Well, why not? If a young chap comes to me to ask advice about marrying, I generally say, at once, "Don't you do it!" But I'm not so sure about you, young 'un. You've been about a good bit, and you're the—the steady running sort. You're not like me, Tommy. Thank your gods for that! You're more like your mother. She was a very excellent woman. Nothing

light or uncertain about her. Yes, son, if you can coax Sibyl Eliot into it, marry her, I say, by all means. You have plenty of money and nothing to do. You shall have the house here, of course. I shall put up with you when I'm asked, but I shan't trouble you much. You see," said old Tommy with his whimsical, mischievous smile, "you see, I'm out so much!" He stood off a few paces and looked at his son and heir with a certain new and amused interest, with a certain dawning of new respect—as one must look at a lad suddenly become a man.

"Little Tommy!" said he, shaking a melancholy head. "Little Tommy! And he's going to get himself married to little Sibyl Eliot! God bless my soul, lad! I must be growing old. It's only last month or last winter, I should think, that I saw little Sibyl Eliot being pushed up and down the lower Avenue in a yellow p'ram. I remember that she had an exceptionally pretty nurse. Um! yellow hair, very nice in the sun-

light, and blue eyes!"

"Sib has red hair!" declared young Tommy, indignantly. "And her eyes aren't blue, they're darkbrown—bronze."

"I was—er—speaking of the nurse," said old Tommy, rubbing a reflective head. "Exceptionally pretty she was.—Aye, aye, Thomas, I must be growing old. Who'd ha' thought it?"

"Nobody!" said young Tommy, laughing. "Nobody, governor. You're years younger than I am. I was saying so only this evening to Aunt Arabella

Crowley."

"Arabella Crowley!" said the elder man, and gave a little chuckle of retrospective amusement. "Arabella has me on her mind, I fear. She was lecturing me, to-night. It's a way she has. Eh, well! she was a dear girl. I might have done worse, thirty years ago. I might have done worse."

Young Tommy was marching up and down the room with a fine disregard of furniture and such. He caught an arm about his father's shoulders, and dragged that impotently protesting gentleman with him, up and

down, up and down.

"And I say, governor," he cried, "I say, you know, this—this thing, even if it—if it should come off, it's to make no difference between you and me, what? We've-well, we've always stuck together, governor, and we're not going to split even for Sib. Sib's very fond of you, you know, and she knows what pals we are, you and I. She knows that there's nothing that we wouldn't do for each other, and she won't expect to-come between, you know. There've been some rotten bad Carterets at one time or another, but they've always stood shoulder to shoulder, whatever happened. They're not going to break that record now." He laughed diffidently with a boy's awkwardness at displaying anything like emotion before another man. He was not in the way of making affectionate speeches to his father, nor of showing tenderness before him, but this sudden great surge of feeling had filled him, all at once, with unwonted affection toward everything he held dear, and vaguely he felt that it would be a relief to express it.

The two had wandered in their aimless tramp out into the long hall, where rows of Carterets in orderly progression toward antiquity peered or swaggered

from their ornate frames.

"Some of those old chaps," said young Tommy, pointing, "did fine things, did they not? And some were shocking bounders, but Carteret never failed Carteret. There's some sort of a motto about it, ain't there, governor? What?"

Old Tommy looked up at the rows of staring Car-

terets and nodded gravely.

"Carteret never failed Carteret," said he. "It has been our boast." And as if some one, just then, had stepped upon his undug grave, a little fit of shivering came over him, and shook him from head to foot.

"I've a bit of a chill," he said. And he turned once more into the dining-room and refilled the little glass with his potent old rye. Then for a time the two sat talking in the library, with its shelf-lined walls and its big, square writing-table in the centre, but, after a few moments, old Tommy shook his head and rose.

"I really must go to my sleep, young 'un," he said. "I'm not quite fit to-night. We must celebrate another time. You understand, don't you, that you've my best wishes? Sibyl's a dear girl. I shall be glad and proud to see her in Carteret House. So, good night, lad, I'm-what's that?"

## CHAPTER IV

## TOMMY DOES NOT FAIL

THE two in the library had not heard Parkins's well-trained steps in the hall outside, but they distinctly heard him now. He was at the door, arguing in his respectful tones with some one who evidently wished to enter—some one with a harsh peremptory voice, in which there was no sign of giving way.

"Who the devil can that be?" said young Tommy. "It sounds like that Hartwell man—little Mrs. Hartwell's husband, but he wouldn't be coming here at this hour. It's after one. I'll just step out there and

see."

As he went, he threw a glance backward over his shoulder and halted in sheer surprise. Old Tommy Carteret stood upright beside the library table. The light from the electric centre lamp fell aslant across his face, and Belshazzar's face must have looked like that when he saw the writing on the wall.

"Jove!" said young Tommy to himself, "the governor is ill! I must get him to bed promptly." Then he turned once more toward the door, and came face

to face with little Mrs. Hartwell's husband.

"Ah, it was you!" said he. "I thought I recognised your voice at the door. Wasn't Parkins going to let you in? Come into the library here. The governor and I were having a late session. Parkins! Mr. Hartwell's hat and coat."

"You need not trouble," said Hartwell to the servant. "I shall not take my coat off." And he pushed by young Tommy into the library. Young Tommy followed him, frowning slightly. He did not like the other man's manner. Of course, it might be that Hartwell had not seen his proffered hand, but, even at that, it was almost too much like the traditional bailiff entering his victim's house.

Carteret senior still stood upright beside the big writing-table, and his face was set like a dead man's face. To say that a person has grown, all in a moment, ten years older is an ancient and abused phrase which has become almost meaningless. Such a momentary transformation, however, can and sometimes does take place in a most startling manner, when such a man as the elder Carteret, unnaturally fresh and youthful in spite of advanced age, is all at once brought face to face with a tremendous emotion. Young Tommy, at the sight, nearly made outcry. Then the figure by the table spoke in a dry voice, totally without expression.

"You—have come to see—me?" it said to the intruder. "We would best be—alone. Tommy, will you be so good as to—leave me with Mr.—Hartwell?

Parkins need not wait up."

"Yes, yes, of course!" said young Tommy, hastily. "Yes, I'll be off." But the newcomer held up his hand.

"My business," he said, "is with Mr. Carteret junior, but I shall be glad if you—" he made a stiff but not unkindly bow to the elder man, "if you will remain."

A sort of tremor passed over old Tommy Carteret, a visible tremor, shaking him.

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"I do not-" said he, and paused to moisten his

lips, "I do not understand."

"You will presently," said the visitor. And old Tommy dropped back into his chair, faltering as very old people do.

"You know," said Hartwell, sharply, turning to where young Tommy stood waiting civilly for the other to seat himself, "you know why I am here?"

Young Tommy gave a puzzled little laugh, for the

situation was quite beyond him.

"Why, no!" he said. "No, I'm afraid I don't, quite."

"After what happened this evening?" persisted the visitor.

"I didn't know," said young Tommy, "that anything had happened this evening—anything, that is," he corrected, with a laugh, "which at all connects you and me."

The other man gave his head a quick, angry shake, exactly as a bull, goaded by the picadors, shakes its head before charging. It was evident that he was in a very deep and dangerous rage, which he was making a strong effort to control.

"You are, I believe, a very young man," said he, looking under his brows at Tommy Carteret. "The fact that you are so young makes this coolness—this effrontery—amazing, sir. Before God, young Carteret, how can you stand, facing me with that smile of unconcern?" The smile of unconcern died swiftly from young Tommy's face, and his mouth drew tight.

"What the devil do you mean?" he said. There was still perplexity in his tone, but with it the beginning

of anger.

"I mean this," said the other man. "You have

done me the greatest wrong one man can do another. You have been welcomed and trusted in my home, and, in return, you have stolen what makes that home possible. Can you laugh and sneer, still? By the unwritten law which men everywhere acknowledge, I have the right to kill you where you stand, even though you stand bare-handed."

Young Tommy did laugh—a short laugh of sheer amazement, and he bent forward, peering into the other man's face to see if, by any chance, Hartwell

could be irresponsible from drink.

"No!" he said under his breath. "No, you're not drunk." And he laughed again in utter helplessness.

The thing was grotesque.

Neither of the two, so great was their preoccupation, had so much as given a glance toward the third man in the room, though it would seem that old Tommy's face might just then have been interesting to see. One would like the chance to observe a condemned criminal's face when, at the very scaffold's edge, a chance—a tiny chance—for escape appears. Still, I think that is hardly a fair comparison to make. Not just here, anyhow. I think old Tommy's mind worked scarce so lightning-quick as this—to see a loophole at the very beginning. I think his first moments of horror and fear had too much benumbed him. For all that, his face must have been interesting. It is a pity there was no one to see.

But even as young Tommy, helpless in his bewilderment, laughed, the elder Carteret was half out of his chair, leaning upon one elbow, one hand across the heavy table. His voice came to the other men in a

palsied whisper, hoarse, and dry.

"Wait! wait!" said old Tommy in his whispering

croak. His eyes sought the interloper. "You don't know what—you are saying!" whispered old Tommy. "Let him go! let my son—go. This is a—matter for you and me." Hartwell shook his head, and he looked at the old man strained across the table's top with a

sort of pity, a sort of sorrowful regret.

"No, old friend," said he. "God knows I regret having to say these things in your hearing, but I must say them. Do you think I am in fun?—I tell you!" he cried, and the hoarse rage came back to his tone, seeming to shake his very body, "I tell you he has robbed me of my honour! Is not that plain enough? Do I speak obscurely? This blackguard, this thief, this scoundrel, boy though he is—"

"No! No!" said old Tommy, still in his broken whisper. "No, you don't understand, Hartwell! You are making a horrible mistake. That is not true!"

I am glad old Tommy said that. I am glad he made a fight, poor and futile though it was, against the odds which were overwhelming him. He tried, but oh, he was weak, was Tommy! Arabella Crowley would have told you that.

"It is not true!" he said, straining impotently toward the accuser. But young Tommy held up

his hand.

"Hold on, governor!" said he. "Just give me a chance. This appears to be my party." He moved a step toward the other man, and there was no more mirth left in his face. It was square and hard.

"Now," he said, "you will explain! You have called me some very hard and unpopular names, and have quite absurdly accused me—if I correctly understand you—of a serious crime. As my father says, the thing is a mistake, a bad one, and one which you will have occasion heartily to regret, but, for the present, please explain yourself."

The other man's breathing was short, and his hands, which he held behind him, shook uncontrollably.

"I am not making a mistake," he said. "If I were in the least uncertain, the brazen—the unbelievable assurance you exhibit would almost convince me. You visited my wife this evening at my home between twelve and one o'clock. When I brought her home from the Devereux ball, where we stayed only a few moments, I went to my club, saying that I should not return before two, as I had a meeting which I expected to be a protracted one. I returned, instead, at halfpast twelve, and, letting myself in with my latchkey, I chanced to hear voices in one of the rooms adjoining the hall. I-listened." Hartwell drew out a handkerchief to wipe his lips, and young Tommy Carteret saw how uncontrollably his hands were shaking, and realised under what a terrible strain the man spoke.

"I listened," he went on, "because I at once recognised the two voices, and, because, some months ago, before—before you left New York to go to London, I had had reason to—to feel disturbed in mind. I—heard enough, to-night, to know that the worst which could befall has—befallen; that my house has been—has been dishonoured.—You devil in man's flesh!" he burst out fiercely, all his rigid control of himself torn for an instant to shreds, "you thief! Can you stand there, calm, and listen? Can you brazen it out still further? Good God, I had not thought——"

"Go on!" said young Tommy Carteret, sharply. "Go on! Leave your cursing till later. You thought you recognised a man's voice. Anything more?"

The quick, sharp tone seemed to bring the other back to his feet.

"Much more," said he. "The man escaped. Some involuntary movement on my part made a noise and gave him warning. He jumped from an open window to some flower beds below, and escaped, but he was so unfortunate as to leave behind him an article of personal use—marked." Hartwell's shaking fingers drew from his coat pocket a handkerchief—a man's handkerchief of white linen.

"You will find," said he, "the Carteret arms in one corner."

There was a long, slow sigh from the man sitting beyond the big centre-table, and a little rustling, crackling sound as the man sank lower, drooping, in his chair, but the others did not hear.

Young Tommy took the handkerchief with a con-

temptuous exclamation.

"Worthless, my friend," said he. "You have not the slightest evidence that the man you heard talking with your wife, and fancied to be me, dropped this."

"There is more," said the other man. "My wife is, and has been from the moment of which I speak—the moment of discovery—in a highly dangerous nervous state, but, in spite of that, I wrung from her a name."

"Aah!" said young Tommy Carteret.

"She lies at home now," said the wronged husband, "tossing from side to side of her bed, alternately moaning and shrieking, always calling upon a name—the same name. Have I said enough?"

"A name," said young Tommy Carteret, slowly and deliberately, as if he were a judge weighing evidence, "a name spoken by a woman in delirium—practically

delirium—a handkerchief, which may or may not have been dropped by the man who jumped into your flower beds, and a voice which you think to have been mine."

"Which I know to have been yours," said the other.

"There is no mistaking it."

"That is nonsense!" said young Tommy. "A voice is very easily mistaken. Why, as a case in point, my father and I have voices amazingly alike." In the very middle of the sentence, his voice caught as something from within gripped him by the throat and by the heart together, but he took fierce hold upon himself and finished the words without apparent break. Then slowly, very slowly, young Tommy's eyes turned to old Tommy, huddled in his chair. One of old Tommy's feet was in the circle of light from the overhead electric lamp, and there was earth caked about the sole—fresh earth and black. As slowly, old Tommy's sunken lids rose, and his eyes met his son's eyes—and they both knew.

Poor old Tommy! Yes, he was pitifully weak. I think he tried. Ah, I know he tried. I think that, even in this moment, he half rose from his chair and fell back again. I think those dry lips of his opened once and twice, but no words came. Yes, he was

weak.

I can see his old face now, so sunken and haggard that you would not have known the spruce beau who had so long and so successfully defied time to mark him. I can see those piteous upturned eyes ask a question of the young eyes above them—clamour a desperate panic-stricken appeal, maybe, though I think not. I think he was beyond panic then. I seem to see him calm, without either hope or despair, somehow in a

region beyond these—putting that question to the son who stood above him.

And I see young Tommy's face, square, hard, inscrutable, with steady, unwinking eyes. I know the lightning flash of his mind—the instant comprehension, the swift connecting of present evidence with Arabella Crowley's warning, with what he had always known of the old beau's character. I see his quick brain, all in that instant's pause, go further over the strange misconception that this Hartwell has formed. I see him put to himself the question those old eyes below are asking, and weigh its uttermost implication. Shall Carteret save Carteret? Shall the strong bear the weak's blame and punishment? Oddly prophetic that conversation of a half-hour previous! Shall Carteret save Carteret? What a coil of circumstance! Men have been hanged for less. Easy, of course, to escape, here. Easy to prove where he had been for every hour of the evening, but, once cleared himself, there's that voice and handkerchief. Poor old governor! Carteret never failed Carteret in time of need.

But what a coil! I think young Tommy must almost have laughed within him at the absurdity of it. There was so much to damn him! What was it this man had said about his suspicions of months ago? True again! Young Tommy had had a spell, during the previous autumn, of going much to the Hartwells. His father had first taken him there. He had liked that little woman. He must have remembered, now, that Hartwell had never been cordial—always a surly beast. What a coil!

Young Tommy turned back toward the other manmind you, this pause had been for no more than an instant, that instant in which a man falling from a height reviews all his life—aye, lives it over again in scenes and pictures. And he made a little hopeless gesture, with his two hands, as it were of defeat, of

acquiescence.

"And if I say that it is I?" he asked. "If I admit my guilt? What is it you would have? Is there reparation for such a thing?" The other man's face went suddenly purple, and one of his arms swung back as if he would strike young Tommy, but he mastered himself with a visible wrench.

"No," said he in an odd, breathless tone—he had been under great strain, mind you, for some time now—
"No, there is no reparation. What has been done cannot be undone. There is no reparation, but there is revenge. Your life is forfeit to me, and I mean to have it."

Young Tommy's face brightened. He had lived much in Europe, and in some things he had come to think as Europeans do. It seemed to him that, when one man injured or insulted another beyond bearing, the most natural and satisfactory recourse of the aggrieved man was to demand the risk of the other's life, as earnest of his seriousness. He believed, with the Europeans, that the prospect of this risk does more than anything else conceivable to put a curb on tongue and action in one's relations with one's neighbour. And so, when this other man spoke of his right over young Tommy's life, young Tommy was glad, for he thought that Hartwell meant a recourse to arms, and that seemed to him a very satisfactory ending to the affair. It might have been so much worse.

"Good!" he said aloud. "I quite agree with you. I will give you the names of two men upon whom I feel able to make such a claim, and your friends can see

them to-morrow, to make all the arrangements. The thing will have to be very quiet, for the American law is rather absurd about such matters."

But the other man, for the first time, laid down his hat and seated himself beside the big centre-table. He was smiling, a little, cold, fixed smile which puzzled young Tommy.

"You-misunderstand me," he said. "I am not a Frenchman or an Italian. I have no love for opéra bouffé in private life. When I said that your life was, by the unwritten law, forfeit to me, I meant it literally."

Young Tommy Carteret gave a short, amazed laugh.

"Do you want to murder me?" he asked contemptuously. "Thanks. I think not. I offer you the only reparation possible in such a case. It is an honourable offer. I certainly shall not stand up barehanded to be shot, nor shall I take rat-poison at your request. Perhaps you would explain."
"I will, at once," said the other man. He main-

tained his odd, cold little smile.

"I do not wish to kill you," said he. "That would be a very poor sort of revenge—over in a moment. If I had meant that I should have come here with a pistol and should have wasted no words. No, I have a better vengeance than that. I intend to make the remainder of your life the hell that my own will be. You have wrecked my happiness forever. I-loved my wife, and I think she—I think she—loved me till you came with your fiend's heart and your devil's tongue. Ah, I shall have my revenge, my lad!" He paused a moment, and again drew a handkerchief across

his lips with that shaking hand.
"You—" he went on, "you are a young man with a young man's love for life and friends and comfort and

happiness. You have social position of the best, wealth, everything a young man could have to make existence a joy. You will leave this life of yours, your friends, your position. You will go alone to some squalid, remote, forgotten corner, and there you will remain so long as I live. I am a strong man of three and forty. I should live thirty years more, perhaps fifty."

Old Tommy Carteret sprang from his chair with a

hoarse cry.

"Madness, madness!" quavered old Tommy. "This is unheard of—impossible! I—will not sit by and hear—my son agree to any such fiendish plan. I tell you," cried old Tommy, beating the air, "I tell you it is all a horrible blunder. I will explain—"

But his son cut in sharply:

"Governor!" and old Tommy's voice broke.

It was a gallant effort, Tommy, that last, last flicker of manhood! It cost dear, I know; as dear, almost, as if it had been a better effort and successful. Poor, old

Tommy! You hadn't the strength, had you?

"Governor!" said young Tommy and caught his father's piteous eyes with his own strong gaze. "This is my affair, governor," he said. "Mine! Please leave it to me." And the father dropped once more back into his chair, faltering, as old people do. Then

young Tommy turned to the other man.

"I quite agree with my father," said he. "What you propose is monstrous—impossible. It is sheer madness, and I refuse absolutely to listen to it. I wish—will you allow me to say that you are, perhaps—quite naturally, indeed—in a state of high excitement to-night. Why not leave this discussion until we can talk of it more calmly? Wait, wait! I acknowledge

that you have been foully wronged, but later, I think, you will see that this—revenge of yours is preposterous. Anyhow, once for all, I refuse to do as you demand."

The other man waited patiently, and there was some-

thing horrible, chilling, in that frozen smile of his.

"Refuse?" he said when young Tommy had finished. "Refuse? I think not. Shall I tell you why?-No, put it in this fashion, each side of the matter by itself. What if you accept? You leave your life here utterly behind. It is as if you suddenly had died-Ah, but a living death, friend, a living death!—I shall know where you are and keep watch over you lest you escape. Here, all goes on as before. No scandal; no outward show of disgrace. My wife continues to live in my house—not as a wife, for I can never forgive what she has done, but the world will know nothing of that. Your father continues his life with no shadow of disgrace upon it. I have no wish to visit your sin upon him. It is you whom I wish to see suffer, you, you! And, as God lives, you shall suffer, alone and in agony.

"Take the other side! You refuse my plan. I publish the whole matter to-morrow. My wife is disgraced forever. You, and your father through you, are disgraced equally. Everywhere you may try to go I shall follow you with my story. All your friends here will suffer. All the friends you may make elsewhere shall know what you have been. Ah, you have great store of pride, you Carterets! I know. You may wreck the life of a neighbour, of a friend-but suffer open disgrace? Never! I know your Carteret blood.

I know it well. Refuse, friend? I think not."

Young Tommy dropped into a chair, and his chin sank to his breast. That smiling man opposite, with his square-set jaw and projecting under-lip, meant

every word he said. He would unfailingly carry out every threat to the bitterest utmost end. Young Tommy's mind ran over the miserable outcome. Pages garnished with stolen photographs in the newspapers. The divorce court. The pitiless investigation with its inevitable discovery of the real culprit. The decree of divorce against that poor, pretty little woman. Black disgrace for the poor old governor, whose only fault was that he was so weak. Averted faces; withheld bows. Oh, yes! he and the governor would have to leave New York-only to be followed everywhere by Hartwell's revenge. Sib! Aye, there's the rub!

Young Tommy turned his eyes to the broken old man across the table, and, for an instant, a very human wave of rage and bitterness flashed over him. It was so cruelly unfair that a man old, past his good years, should steal his selfish pleasure, and a man young, with life before him-life and Sibyl!-pay the vicarious penalty. But, as he looked at the huddled, sunken figure, something piteous in it called out to him, the weak crying upon the strong, and-he had loved the governor very dearly. Shall Carteret fail Carteret? "No," said young Tommy to himself, and he knew to its full what the answer meant. "Oh, no!"

In that instant a boy died, died forever, and a man sat in his place, chin sunken upon breast, eyes staring out into a future so grim, so black, so lonely that there was no rift of light in it anywhere, no breath of hope, no gleam of comfort.

"Carteret never failed Carteret."

Good-bye, Sib! - Oh, Sib, Sib, you're so very beautiful!

Half an hour later young Tommy gently closed the

front door and, with dragging steps, turned back toward the library. He felt an odd sense of extreme physical fatigue, a curious exhaustion. But, at the library door, he halted and called out sharply:

"Governor!" Governor!"

Old Tommy Carteret had not roused himself or spoken since his last pitiful protest to Hartwell. He had seemed not to notice Hartwell's departure, but had crouched, sunken in his chair, silent and motionless. Now he was talking to himself, babbling gently with wise, cunning nods and smiles and grimaces.

"Governor!" cried young Tommy with a great fear at his heart, and the old man looked up slyly and shook

a warning finger.

"But nobody must ever know, Dolly!" he quavered. "Mind you, it's our secret. Nobody must ever know!

Eh, Dolly mine?"

Now, who was "Dolly"? Not poor, little Mrs. Hartwell. Her name was Anne. Was Dolly another one, Tommy, another poor, pretty fool out of that storied past of yours? One of the army that's waiting to face you on the other side? I'd give something to know.

Young Tommy ran for the decanter and persuaded the old man to drink a few swallows, but it seemed of no avail. He did not know his son at all. He called him Henry. Once he mentioned Arabella Crowley, calling her by her maiden name, Arabella Carter.

"I think I shall marry her, Henry," he said. "She's a dear girl—— But, Henry, they're all such

dear girls!"

Was not that like old Tommy? It might fitly be carved upon his tombstone.

Parkins, routed from bed, helped to get the master

upstairs, and Doctor Langdon came at the trot, sum-

moned hastily by telephone.

"He has had a shock," said young Tommy, "a—fright, sort of, and an hour of rather severe strain. Is

this—this state likely to continue?"

"Oh, no!" said the man of medicine. "He has some fever, and, I judge, the shock was severe. He'll come round in a couple of days. Nothing alarming. I'll look in to-morrow. Keep him in bed. He never could stand shocks, you know. He was always a bit weak, Thomas was."

"Yes," said young Tommy, "the governor always was a bit—weak. By the way, I was to leave town tomorrow, on—important affairs. Safe to go? What?"

"Perfectly, perfectly!" said old Doctor Langdon.

"All he needs is quiet. Well, good night."

The elder Carteret was sleeping under an opiate. Young Tommy went back to that judgment-hall, death-chamber, library, to write a word to Sibyl. Perhaps he should not have done it. Perhaps it was a little selfish, a tiny blot on a fair shield of conduct. He debated it elaborately, but he could not deny himself that one pleasure. And I cannot be sorry. One thing he sternly demanded: There should be no word of love in the note.

"Sib, dear," he wrote, after many false starts:

"I shall not see you to-morrow—I mean to-day, after all; nor ever, I think, Sib. Something has happened.—You'll guess that, of course—and I am going away. We'll say that I suddenly died last night after leaving you. That's the best way to look at it. I died. Set up a stone to my memory, Sib, and then forget me—all but a little, girl, all but a little. Don't quite forget. That is all—save one thing. You are not to try to find out what has occurred. It will be kept quiet, here, I believe. No good would come

to me of your digging it up, and infinite harm to others. Still—this is one luxury I'm going to allow myself out of a great deal that isn't luxury at all—if there should be a tale spread, know that it's not true. I've done nothing to be ashamed of, nothing that you'd be ashamed of, for me. Good bye, Sib. I expect I was too happy, last night. I expect I dreamed too much, and so luck gave me this facer. "Good bye,

"TOMMY CARTERET."

This is the note in which there was to be no love. Young Tommy read it carefully through, many times.

"God knows there is no love in that," he said. "It might be written to Aunt Arabella Crowley—to a man even. Sib, Sib!"

Oh, Tommy, you were a boy no longer! You'd suddenly become a man, I know, but the man knew as little about a woman's mind as the boy had known. No love in it? Tommy, Tommy!

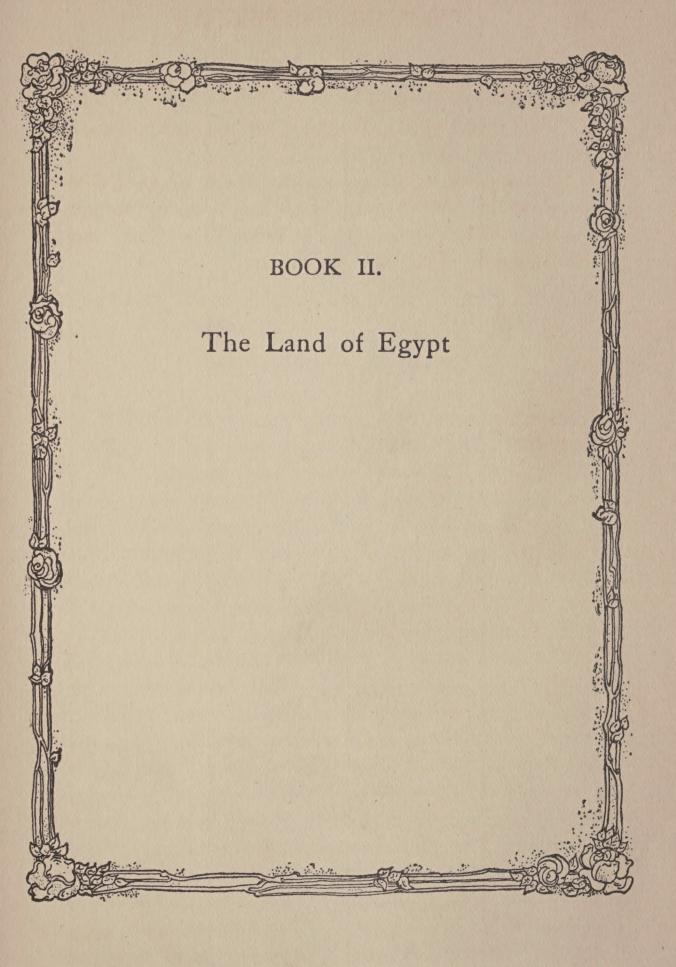
This note sealed and addressed, he wrote again, at great length, to his father. He was an hour over it. And he left instructions for Parkins that what he had written was to be given to old Tommy on the evening of that day or as soon as the old man was able to read and understand.

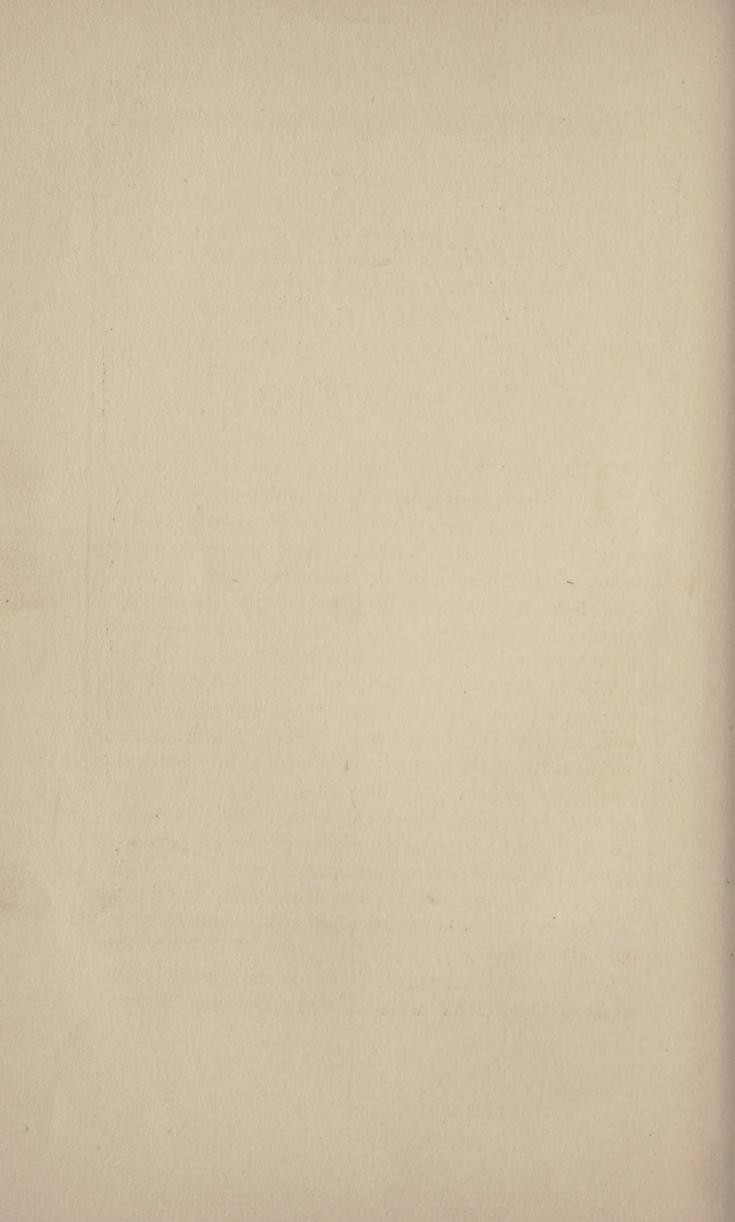
At the end of all he rose, white and very weary, and went to one of the windows. He pulled aside the heavy curtains which had been drawn for the night, and his haggard eyes stared out across the square, where the grey dawn was brightening. Sparrows cheeped and twittered and fought on the grass plots; two ragged loafers were asleep in grotesque postures on one of the park benches; a wagon laden with rattling milk cans bumped across the pavement, somewhere out of sight; and, from the south side of the square, came the scrape

and shriek of an electric car rounding the corner of Fourth Street.

"Sib!" said young Tommy Carteret, staring wearily into the grey dawn. "Sib!"

The picture of him standing there alone by the window, the dreary sound of his voice, saying monotonously over and over that one word "Sib—Sib!" have haunted me. I cannot forget them.





# CHAPTER V

#### HOME

EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF YOUNG TOMMY
CARTERET. "THE CABIN ON HALFBREED HILL." JUNE 3RD

"O-DAY I moved into my cabin here on the hill. It has been swept and scrubbed and purged and garnished since I bought it, with its few acres, from young Satterlee, a week ago—young Satterlee of the tragic eyes. That a pall hangs over it, that death has so lately been here, rather pleases my whim than otherwise. It is a fit place for such as I.

My cabin and I should become friends.

"It is but a tiny thing of two rooms, though there is a bit of a kitchen built on at the rear. A few steps away is the stable where Satterlee's good mare—my mare now—is housed. A shed for the cart leans drunkenly against one side of the stable, and Jared, my lad of all work, does for us both—for the mare and for me. Jared is washing dishes in the kitchen as I write. He broke one a moment ago, and I heard him—in a carefully raised tone—berate the inoffensive cat for an ornery skunk, designing, I should think, to cast blame upon the cat in the matter of the dish. In a few moments Jared will finish and go, for the night, to his father's farm across Fisher's Bottom. Then I

shall be left alone in my home. Oh, little gods and

great ones, how you must laugh! Home!

"I have written a word to my jailer—to my master in New York, to tell him that I am settled here, and I have also written, as briefly, to the governor. Poor old governor! He's suffering for all this too, I know. He won't suffer quite enough to tell the truth and take my place here. Still, he's suffering. A man's no stronger than he's made. How shall I blame the governor? Oh, yes! I dare say I shall have fits of rage and fury at him in these years to come, but—a man's no stronger than he's made, any more than a bridge is, and the governor was made weak, weak and lovable.

"So now that these two are disposed of for the present, I begin this journal. It is of common report that no one ever kept a journal save with a sneaking thought of eventual publication—or at least that the thing should, in time, come to other eyes. My thought is different. I shall write in this book, day by day, to the end that when I am grown old—come to the retrospective years (Shall I still be here on this cursed hill, I wonder? Ah, none o' that! None o' that!), I may look back, not with the dim eyes of memory, but in the accuracy of black and white, upon the young man who was, all in a night, dragged so roughly from his small particular heaven in the heart of the world and thrown into this small particular hell in outer darkness. His actions, thoughts, impressions, and his growth or shrinking, should be of interest, one day, to that retrospective old man. The situation is unusual.

"It shall be to me, this journal of mine, friend, intimate, confidant—counsellor, even. I shall have no other friend—that is evident. My hell is a lonely hell. That relentless avenger in New York chose it cun-

ningly. I shall have no other friend, and therefore when each long day is done, I mean to sit down with this one, who shall have to me a certain living personality, and I shall talk to him, argue with him, tell him the thoughts that are within me. I seem to see entertainment—Lively? No. Exciting? Hardly. But who

am I that I should pick and choose?

"Jared has 'finished up his swipes' and gone. He called out a 'good night!' to me just now from the kitchen door. It grows dim in the cabin. Out to the doorstep with me, and a seat there, facing the West! Not bad, for lookout, my hill-top, eh? The sun is down in a welter of blood beyond the far ridge. will have been a fine battle, that, for all the west is gore-streaked-splashes of crimson and gold and orange and dun. What a sky for a painter-man! Ah, but he'd never get it, for it won't be still! Between winks it alters and shifts, and it's paling fast. He might get the mist, though, that flat, thin sheet of whiteblue mist that hangs over the bottom-land.—I have not said that this is a land of hills and bottoms.—The bottom I look across from my cabin door, facing west, is a great gulf, hollow as a bowl, and four miles from rim to rim. A watercourse twists through it, a torrent in spring, they tell me, a trench of dry boulders in summer, like those fiumari one sees in Sicily.

"No, he couldn't get even the mist, your painterman, for that is shifting now, writhing in the still air as if it had life in it (instead of death), making crazy shapes, turning round and round upon itself, like a dog before it settles to sleep.—Now it's still, painterman. Quick with you! And look! There's a thin, straight column of smoke streaming up through the very middle of it, like a Pagan altar-fire. A tree-stump

burning, eh? Who's burning tree-stumps at this time of the year? Stump-fire or altar-fire, it's a fine picture, my painter-man.

"Put it on canvas, and they'll call you a liar.

"Darkening already? The nights fall swiftly hereabouts. What's the droning whisper from the east? Ah, the 'katydids' in the oak-flat, yonder! Thank God, they're no nearer. What an infernal din if one is walking through a wood road! One must raise one's voice to be heard above it. I had never supposed that insects could make such a row, even in number. Jared's little yellow-haired niece—I helped her fetch the cow, last evening—assured me that there are also 'katydidn'ts,' and tried to teach me to distinguish, but it wants a bit of time and experience, I should think. Time and experience! Ah, well, I shall have 'em, child. I shall have 'em both, full sore, in this solitary hell of mine!

"How did he know of the place, that devil in New York? Can he ever have been here in this Godforgotten waste, this 'Egypt' land?

"N. B.—I must find out why they call it 'Egypt.'

"I asked Jared yesterday, but he did not know. Such a strange land, walled off from the world with ramparts of poverty and ignorance and superstition and sloth. To know the poverty, you have but to see the women—poor patient cattle—as I saw them on Sunday at the school-house prayer-meeting, tricked out in their best bits of fête-day finery. Oh, such pitiful comic bits of finery!—a bow of rusty, cracking silk ribbon, a bonnet of thirty years back, a sunshade split and ragged. One must shriek with laughter if one had not to weep. To judge the ignorance, witness the eighteen-year-old lad who helped Jared move my things into the cabin

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here. This lad had never seen a railway train; and yet the nearest town is but nine miles distant. To judge the superstition—you cannot judge it. Last year a lone old woman lived hereabouts. She was reputed to have the evil-eye. Her cabin was burned over her head, and the woman driven forth. They found her body in a wood shortly afterward, and buried it where found.

"How shall I get on with these people? How will they regard me-alien interloper that I am? They have but to let me alone. I shall not trouble them. You and I, good friend, must go it alone, our term of prison-life here. We must suffice each other, for I have no stomach for these lean-faced, furtive-eyed natives of the soil. I like them not. Aye, you and I must serve our term together. Will it be long or short? -'I should live thirty years more,' he said, our jailerman, that never-to-be-forgotten night. 'Thirty years more,' said he, 'perhaps fifty.' And yet he may die to-night of an apoplexy. Will it be long or short?— Thirty years! Thirty and twenty-six make fifty-six. That's getting into old age. What shall I be at fiftysix? Ah, stop it, stop it! We mustn't let our minds stray into that field, friend. We must build a wall there, high and strong, with no gate, if we would not go mad-Come, it's dark. The stars are out, and a cool breath, with fever in it, breathes up out of that mist-wrapped bottom. Into the house with us and light the lamp. In a week the box of books should be here. That will give us something for the candle hours. Meanwhile, the 'katydids'-and didn'ts are asleep-I hear no more droning whisper from the eastern oaks. Shall we follow where they lead? My bed waits in there, among the shadows of the farther room, little Mrs. Satterlee's bed.—I wonder if it is haunted. Good night, friend!"

Oh, Tommy, Tommy! Here's a new Tommy, indeed! I have read these first pages of your little journal-book many times over. They have made me laugh, and they have made me weep. Such an imposing little chapter, Tommy! Such literature! Were you quite, quite, honest, I'm wondering, when you so scornfully denied the "sneaking thought of eventual publication"? I seem to see you, Tommy, seated on your doorstep to the west, writing down sentence after sentence of lofty thought, and almost-almost forgetting your woe for satisfaction over its portrayal. I seem to hear a sort of inward smack of the lips over that grandiloquent bit about the "dim eyes of memory." Still, though I could have done it better myself-and with far less rhetoric-I have chosen to let you open this portion of the story in your own words. And Tommy, you will forgive me, I know, if I poke a little fun at the words. God knows the time came soon enough when there was no fun to be found, not even by me who love my joke. Let's laugh while we may, Tommy! Yet, though I chaff you, I'm applauding, too. It is a good, brave little chapter, this. No whining, no cursing at fate—I should have railed, I know -and, best of all, in all your lofty paragraphs, in your most intimate self-searchings, there is no mention of Sibyl. The Carteret blood was at its best in you. I know what that silence cost. I know how you set your teeth and forced her from your thoughts. I see her, Tommy, standing just outside the wall, begging to come in-begging so hard, smiling so divinely! Aye, I know what it cost to stop your eyes and ears.

### CHAPTER VI

# ARABELLA CROWLEY FROM THE MACHINE

THE case of books arrived duly, and with it boxes of other things—"I might quite as well be comfortable, though in hell," said young Tommy.—It required three trips of the cart to town to fetch them all. Then there was a great hammering, and sawing, and driving of nails in the cabin on the hill-top. This endured for two busy days, and, at the end, Tommy stood apart and wiped his brow.

"Not bad, eh?" he said to the admirable Jared.

The admirable Jared gave an imitation of a stork

in a thoughtful moment.

"It might be wuss," he said cautiously. "Them little carpets is shorely handy—even if they don't fit." Young Tommy looked at his Persian rugs and laughed. "And them curtings in the doorway betwixt the two rooms," pursued the admirable Jared, "now ain't they a leetle bit wore out—faded-like?" The "curtings" were from Khorassan, in dull reds and browns and blues, blended exquisitely. "Winston's store down to town," said the critic, "has got curtings with flowers on 'em jest like life. Maybe they'd brisk the haouse up some if you felt'd you could afford 'em."

"We'll think it over," said young Tommy. "I expect the house will need brisking up in time." He ran his hand lovingly over the rows of books on their shelves, and rescued the late Marcus Aurelius from

possible contamination beside the "Heptameron" of

Margaret of Navarre.

"Was you expecting to read 'em all through from kiver to kiver?" demanded Jared in a tone of awe. "It'd take a right smart of a time, to be shore."

"I shall have a right smart of time," said young Tommy. "These may keep me out of mischief. Anyhow, sloth is one of the seven deadly sins, I'm told. It would never do to become slothful—now, would it?"

The admirable Jared suspected that fun was being poked at him, and withdrew toward the stable, but he paused on the threshold to express unstinted approval of the "cheer." Tommy had acquired a long steamer-chair of Indian cane with a foot-rest and an adjustable back.

"That there cheer can a'most talk," said the enthusiastic Jared. "She's the finest cheer I ever see. Any time 'at you die, Mr. Carter, I wish't you'd will me that cheer."

Thus Tommy made his hell a comfortable hell with rugs, and a few pictures, and bits of brass or copper, and a noble store of books, both good and bad; and the disposal of all these things, the arranging and rearranging, the making, as it were, of a little house for himself, tided him along very nicely for some days.

Indeed, I think that in these first few weeks he was far from absolute unhappiness. The opening of his little journal has, to be sure, a gloomy and portentous atmosphere, but I have already said that I suspect Tommy here of an attempt to be literary. I do not think he was so melancholy as he sounds. He was very young, you must remember, and circumstances, cruel ones to be sure, had thrown him suddenly into an environment different from anything he had ever

known. He would not be the Tommy I know him to have been if this new environment had not had power to distract him. Add to this that he had done a big thing, a fine thing, in coming here. I think the exaltation of that was slow to die.

I doubt not it would be interesting, had you time, and I space, to live with Tommy in these early days, to know something of this strange land of hills and bottoms, and of these "lean-faced, furtive-eyed natives of the soil" among whom he found himself; but this is the story of Tommy Carteret, not of the land of Egypt. We must not leave the picture quite unframed, lest you refuse to hang it so on your wall, but no over-wrought setting of gilt and plaster. Leave Egypt for another hand. This is the story of Tommy Carteret.

I have said that I thought he was not all unhappy at first. I am casting about for the time-since there must always be a time of beginning-when the outward things failed of their power, and Tommy came face to face in the shadows with that fate which had been waiting, close at hand, to link her arm with his. I think the time was when Tommy, riding one morning to the village, nine miles away, was given a certain letter, which, all in a moment, set his heart fiercely to work and blurred his vision. He had been feeling that morning particularly fit. It was a cool, clear morning, which promised, later on, a blazing day, but Tommy made an early start—with the dew, and as the mare laboured up the steep hills, or picked her way down them, stumbling among loose stones, he whistled cheerily to her, and refrained from criticism about the stumbling. He even burst into song-though he had no singing voice—when they trotted easily

through the level wood-flats where live things rustled in the undergrowth, making the mare prick her ears, and birds passed comments upon him from the branches overhead. He nodded a fraternal "Howdy" to the natives as he met them afoot or mounted, noting without the slightest resentment their curious stares, and when at last he reached the straggling, unlovely village, he did not sneer, as was his habit, but said to himself that it wasn't a bad little place, as country towns go—though this was the most barefaced flattery. The summer was in Tommy's veins, and cares stood away from him.

A half-dozen of the village fathers sat in the square of shade before "Winston's," their chairs tilted back against the bit of iron railing. They said "Howdy" in a very friendly fashion to Tommy, as he dismounted, and asked him the purchase price of his leather putties. They had no especial love for the interloper, but he was an event in an eventless morning, and therefore to be welcomed.

Tommy wanted, among other things, a clasp-knife of ample proportions and businesslike aspect. Winston, who had risen to go into the store with him, set out a box of them, and recounted the time-honoured jest about the gentleman from Kentucky, who, on being shown a clasp-knife with two blades and a corkscrew, demanded, as more suitable to his uses, one with a single blade and two cork-screws. Young Tommy laughed with flattering appreciation—the summer was in his veins—and the gratified Winston was for raking up further ruins from the dead past, but checked himself.

"Oh, I 'most forgot!" said he. "They's a letter and a telegraph for you-all.—Ben here goin' on three—

four days." It might be explained that Winston's was

"general store" and post-office combined.

Young Tommy ripped open the yellow envelope of the "telegraph" with fingers that shook a bit. The thing was of no importance—a communication from the Chicago house which had sent him his books and rugs. But the superscription of the letter was in a stiff and crabbed old-fashioned hand, which sent the blood to Tommy's face in a rush and drew it away again, leaving him white. Arabella Crowley's hand! How did she know? It was as if old Arabella herself had stepped out from behind the sugar barrels and the molasses butt to confront him. How did she know? Tommy's fingers twitched at the end of the envelope, eager to tear it open. Then he halted, and, after a moment, put the letter away slowly in an inner pocket. Aunt Arabella! He walked to the open door, his eyes fixed upon vacancy, and there once more halted and took the letter into his hands. He was oddly afraid of it. For a moment, he had a swift impulse to tear it to bits, unread, and his fingers actually strained at the tough paper, but there was no strength in them. How did she know, and what had she to say to him? Whatever it was, better to leave it unsaid. He had been almost content a few moments before. This thing snatched him back-just the sight of old Arabella's hand-into the shame and horror and strain he had tried so hard to put from him.

His troubled eyes roamed the dusty, unkempt street without, where the mounting sun already beat hot and brazen, but his mind was a thousand miles away on forbidden ground. Town people drifted past by one and two—coatless, round-shouldered men with the tramp's slouching walk, slatternly women in sunbon-

nets, strangely attired children, bare-headed and barefooted. Young Tommy's eyes rested upon them, seeing, but taking no note. Two young girls, gipsyish creatures, with their hair about their eyes in tangles, and ungirt waists, stopped to exchange pleasantries with the loungers before the store. A woman, dressed in a sort of parody of bygone fashions, a painted woman, mincing and pathetically fine, walked by, casting a sidelong glance. She, Winston explained, chuckling, was unique in being the village character who professed no character at all. Then another young woman, a girl, gipsyish again, but with a certain untutored, instinctive feeling for the suitable in attire a cut above these villagers, surely, a handsome girl. A sheepish, sullen youth lagged half a step behind her, and evoked unconcealed derision from the seated loafers.

"That there's old Dave Canfield's gal," said Winston. "Lives nigh to you-all, jest acrost the little bottom on the Dutch Creek road. Old Dave's got two gals—this is the least one—the other's a widow woman."

"Eh?" said young Tommy, waking suddenly. "Eh, what? Yes, very hot. I must be getting toward—home, before the sun is too high. There is one more box to come down from those Chicago people. It should be here to-morrow, I think. I will send Jared in for it, with the cart, toward the end of the week.

"Better hev a taste before ye go," suggested Winston, and proffered the stone jug which stood in the shade without, convenient to the line of tilted chairs. Young Tommy politely tasted, and tried to preserve an immobile countenance, for the whiskey was unspeakable. Then he mounted the mare and turned

down the stretch of glaring white dust. The mare had her work cut out for her that day. Nine miles to town in the cool of the morning—then, almost at once, nine miles back in the grilling sun; but she was a strong beast, big of bone, well-fed, and up to much more than Tommy's hundred and fifty pounds of weight. She could have borne him all day without complaint.

He rode slowly, unmindful of the sun's glare, those unseeing eyes of his fixed vacantly ahead. Once, at the outskirts of the town, he turned aside to allow a two-wheeled cart to pass in a whirl of dust. There were two people in the cart, a man and a woman, and young Tommy was dimly conscious that the woman turned in her seat to favour him with a deliberate stare, but his mind was away upon more important matters, and he gave no note. The woman was the girl Winston had pointed out as the least one of old Dave Canfield's two daughters. Uphill and down young Tommy rode, through pleasant, odorous wood-roads, and along open spaces where the sun's glare lay quivering on the powdery dust, but he saw none of it, save with eyes which carried no message back to the brain.

At Half-Breed Hill he put the mare away, directing Jared, whom he found in the kitchen, to rub her down, and, seated at his writing-table within, laid Arabella Crowley's letter before him. He was afraid of it, but he could not have told why. In all probability, it contained no more than expressions of regret at his departure, and demanded, in Arabella's forthright fashion, his reasons for so sudden a flight. He reasoned—very correctly, as afterward appeared—that Arabella had somehow wormed his whereabouts out of old Tommy, and there was every reason why she should be expected to write to him. Still, though he

could not have told you why, young Tommy was afraid. Perhaps—ah, there's the clew, I fancy!—perhaps he was afraid, not so much of old Arabella's letter as of himself. He had, up to this time, been very successful in keeping the home things out of mind, in pushing them back, as it were, by main strength.—A hopeless struggle, Tommy! No man's strength is untiring.—He had had no letters at all, save one from the faithful Parkins, stating that the master, though still weak and unable to write, had recovered again. Yes, I think Tommy was afraid of himself.

In any case, he hovered and hesitated over the letter, as one hovers back and forth in the street before the dentist's office, and, after an hour of miserable indecision, put the thing aside till evening, and went for a tour of exploration along the wooded slopes above Dutch Creek. But in the evening, when his solitary dinner was done, when Jared had finished with the dishes and had called his good night through the cabin, when the sun had gone down—again in a welter of blood—and the mists rose over the great bottom, young Tommy seated himself at the doorstep, and the envelope of Arabella Crowley's letter ripped under his slow fingers. He felt again the same odd, unreasonable dread. It was like casting a die for his life.

The envelope was an unusually large, square one, and, between the sheets of the paper within, was a flat parcel, tissue wrapped, stiffer than the pages. Tommy laid this beside him until the letter should be read.

"I have just come from Washington Square," began old Arabella in her characteristically abrupt fashion, "and, from your father, Tommy, I have wormed some of the facts in this sad business. Never mind

how I managed it. He fancied that I already knew more than I did. Anyhow, I got from him enough to put together with certain things I really did know, and others I guessed. Tommy, dear, you are a brave lad, braver even than I thought you could be, but you are also a fool-[How like old Arabella!] for there is such a thing as carrying bravery and self-sacrifice far beyond the limit of reason. However, Tommy, I'm not going to scold. What's done is done, and there is no turning back the clock. What we must face now is the future and how this thing is to be righted. I confess that I do not see how it is to be managed, but we'll find a way, lad. We'll find a way. We must, since I know you will make no effort yourself-Oh, Tommy, what a thing it was to do!-Your father has not yet written to you, I suppose. He's shirking, as usual, for he's weak-weak! Oh, yes! I can speak harshly of him to-day, though I've loved him-in a fashionso long. I'm very sore and resentful, and, somehow (explain it if you can), humiliated in his humiliation. We can't, we women, easily forgive a man we've cared for when he does a cowardly thing, even though we knew all along that he was a coward. I've forgiven him a great deal, you know, at one time or another, but this I think I shall never forgive, though I shall always, so long as he and I live, have a certain tenderness for him.

"By the way, since you will probably have been without news of him, he is still in his bed—you will picture old Parkins's horror when I insisted upon seeing him—and the thing has broken him, Tommy. He is an old man at last, he who dodged age so long. His hand shakes and his eyes are dull. He is well enough; he might be up and about if he chose, but I think he

shrinks, with all the feeling left in him, from the letter he knows he must write to you, and, therefore, pro-

longs this illness to the last possibility.

"I have been talking to Sibyl since I came from the Square, and I have told her all I know about the matter. At the end of this letter will be a line from her. She has asked me to inclose it. I cannot quite make her out, Tommy, she says so little, and hides so well—where did she learn it?—what she feels. Only, when I told her that you had gone into exile for something your father had done, she looked up quickly, and her

eyes went very bright, and she said:

"'Yes, yes! Tommy would do that!' And at the end, when I had talked a long time, and she had sat quiet, she said: 'He is a brave, brave man, dearest. I should like him to know how brave I think he is.' And that is all, save, perhaps, what she may have said to you in this sheet I am to inclose. Perhaps, if I were calmer, less incensed over the whole thing, less fresh from my scene with your father, I could have read her better. Somehow, I am certain that she cares more than I had thought, though she has given no evidence of it. She goes about as much as ever, but she does not laugh so much, I think. She has turned graver.—Another thing I am inclosing here. Sibyl does not know, but she would be glad, I believe, if she did. It is a photograph of her, made a month since. I have taken it from its card, the better to slip it into this envelope. Keep it by you, lad. It will be by way of an anchor, maybe.

"Now I have written too much and must stop. I wanted you to know that I understand, and that Sibyl understands too. But one thing above all things, Tommy! Don't give up hope that this matter will be

arranged. You have a strain of melancholy in you, a brooding strain. I have watched it since you were a boy. Don't lose hope. Think of your exile as a thing to be tided over as best it can, not as a life to live. We shall have you at home again before long. That I know.

"So, for to-night, good bye. Write to me if you feel like it. I shall keep you informed of anything that seems encouraging here. I rather think something can be done, after a time, with the Hartwell man.

"Do you remember that my poor old bones foreboded evil on that night of the Devereuxs' ball?

"Good bye, dear lad! Don't give up the ship.

"ARABELLA CROWLEY."

Then young Tommy's hand shook a little, as he turned the last page, and Sibyl's inclosure lay in sight. It was very brief.

"I want you to know that I'm glad, Tommy," it said. "I should be glad even if I thought that this thing was to last forever. Oh, Tommy, you are braver and truer and more faithful than any other man in the world, and I'm so proud of you! Keep a stout heart, Tommy, and don't give up hope. Remember always that we're thinking of you and waiting for you to come back to us.

"SIBYL."

Tommy's hands, automaton-like, loosed the cord and tissue-paper from the other inclosure, and then a great choking gasp broke from him, and he bowed his head over Sibyl's picture, calling upon it in mad, stumbling words as if it could hear him and understand.

It was an hour later, when the swift darkness had fallen, that he rose and groped his way into the cabin

and made lights there. He sat down at his writing-table, and, pulling out a book, propped the picture of Sibyl Eliot against it in the glow from the lamps. Then he settled back in his chair, chin on breast, staring, and the girl in the picture smiled into his eyes—Sib's grave, sweet smile—and seemed to say:

"I want you to know that I'm glad, Tommy, glad!"

And again, presently:

"Remember always that we're thinking of you, and

waiting for you to come back to us."

"Sib!" said Tommy Carteret aloud. "Oh, Sib, you're so very beautiful!" And the girl in the picture smiled divinely. "Now you are a dear Tommy!" said Sibyl.

It must have been a long time that he sat there staring at the picture on the writing-table—hours, probably. He could not have told when his thoughts slipped into the matter of old Arabella's letter—the matter of his exile here in Egypt land. He had been afraid of the letter, strangely and without reason, and, now that he had read it, his fears were quite as strangely and unreasonably realised. Not only, it seemed, had the letter broken down the barrier which he had set up between present and past, loosing his long-deferred misery upon him in a sudden great flood, but in some quite inexplicable fashion it convinced him that the misery was to be life-long, that he should never return to the old things.

He could not, I am sure, have offered any argument in support of this position. He could have pointed to no word or phrase in Arabella Crowley's letter which was capable of destroying hope. Arabella, indeed, had expressed herself strongly in the opposite extreme. Still the conviction fixed itself in him and grew, spread-

ing, like some strong, dark stain, over the walls of mind and soul, over the tentative experimental pictures the soul flashes before the mind's eye, forecasting the future that is to come.

"It is written in the books," he said, that night, in communion with his friend and familiar, the journal. "This is the end-and the beginning. The end of Thomas Carteret, 2nd, and the birth of Thomas Carter, hermit, of Half-Breed Hill. I think I should put up a stone, outside on my hill-top-or should it stand in Washington Square, north? No, here, I think. For it is here, this night, that I have given up hope. I do not know why, but I am convinced with all the conviction there is in me that Tommy Carteret is dead. -'Pray for him!'-I think I shall paint on my doorlintel that old motto, which was a king's boast-alas! I must twist it into something quite different from a boast!—J'y suis; j'y reste—I must write to Aunt Arabella, dear old soul, and tell her not to meddle. Who knows what might come if she should go stirring up my jailer's suspicions? No; let sleeping dogs lielet dead men rest in their graves-of exile. I shall not write to Sibyl. She must forget as soon as may be. And may that be soon, indeed! Everything decent and manly in me cries out for that—everything cowardly and fond begs her to remember. Yes, she'll forget. Aunt Arabella was quite wrong about her caring. She didn't care. She might have—thank God for that!—She was, maybe, on the edge of it. I could have won her, I think, but she'll forget, for Tommy Carteret's dead. Here's Carter, of Half-Breed Hill, squeezing out a tear for him. Ah, let him rest, let him rest!"

Later still in the night, when his pen trailed idle

upon the pages of the diary—his head too full of grim shapes and shadows for writing, he rose and took down from the wall, where it hung over his writing-table, a certain Japanese picture in an odd gold frame made like a temple gate, and he opened with his clasp-knife the back of the frame, taking out the print and slipping the photograph of Sibyl Eliot into its place. Then, with the frame hung once more upon the wall over the writing-table, he sat back again in his chair, chin on

breast, and stared at it for a long time.

"That picture," said Carter, of Half-Breed Hill, in his grim, dark humour, "is the picture of a girl who lived a very long time ago in a foreign country. I have cut it out of a book and hung it here, because it is beautiful, and because the young woman it represents must have been all that a man imagines and dreams of and invents when he is picturing the girl whom he will, one day, find and love and live for.—She must have been," said Carter of Half-Breed Hill, "as lovely as she is beautiful. She must have been pitiful and kind and full of sweetness. She must have been one to laugh with you when you were gay-to romp with you, go on every sort of lark with you, take your hand and run away across the world, laughing because the world was good; and she must have been one quick to tears when you were down on your luck and the blue devils were at your throat.—She'd have crept in close to you," said young Carteret, bitterly, "when you were sitting in the dusk, fagged-out or blue. She'd have laid her head against your shoulder, and slipped an arm about your neck, and told you that it—that it didn't matter, that nothing mattered if only you two were together. She'd cling to you, comforting you-mothering you, and her-hair would be soft against your cheek, and you'd feel her heart beat over yours in the dark, and there wouldn't be a damned thing in all the forsaken world that could touch you or harm you, just because she was there."

Oh, Tommy, Tommy! by what sudden magic had you learned all this? Women had never been in your line.

"She must have been all that," said young Tommy, nodding to the girl in the picture, "all that and more, more! My God, how much more she must have been! How many sweet, unspeakable things she must have been to the man she—she—cared about, if ever there was such a man. And so, because she was the loveliest woman who ever smiled and wept under God's sun, and because she—is dead, long since, because she lived in quite another world, I have hung her picture here, as one might hang a Madonna.

"There is no impertinence in it," he said, appealing a bit anxiously, as it were, to the girl in the picture. "I have never known you. We—don't live on the same planet at all. You will never see me, nor I you. There is no impertinence in it. You're—safe there in your temple gate. It's a—shrine, sort of. I only

want to-look at you, sometimes."

What was it old Arabella Crowley's letter had said?

—"Keep it by you, lad. It will be by way of an an-

chor, maybe."

"'An anchor?'" said young Carter, of Half-Breed Hill, and shook a slow head. "No, for I'm anchored to nothing save my hill-top, here. No, this is not the picture of any girl in that world out yonder. It is a goddess in a temple gate. A goddess in a temple gate is no anchor, but a star very many thousands of miles away. Looking up through the pit's mouth, one may

see it, but stars are beyond reach, Aunt Arabella, far

beyond reach."

He dropped once more into his moody silence, staring under his brows at the picture of Sibyl Eliot, and so, by turns talking and staring, he sat until the lamps burned low, and finally went out with an evil smell, and the dawn peered in at the windows, chill and grey.

# CHAPTER VII

### TOMMY SOWS THE WIND

So Now you know when it was that Tommy gave up hope—"when," I say; not "why." Tommy himself could not have told you why. It was, I think, one more blind move in that extraordinary game of mischance. I think Fate had been waiting for it, biding her time among the shadows. Now at last she must have linked her arm in Tommy's and said to him:

"Come, friend! we'll go a-gathering thistles."

It was a week after the coming of Arabella Crowley's letter, and it had not been a good week for Tommy. The physicians and surgeons say that, when a man has suddenly lost a limb, or gone blind, or found himself, all at once, condemned to a bedridden life, the mind requires an astonishingly short time to readjust itself, to accept the new conditions. That covers, though, only the first fierce, futile rebellion, the screaming and cursing, the frenzy of beating one's head against the wall. It does not reach the after-ache, the slow, hardwrung bitterness, the sleepless nights of staring into the dark, and daring God to strike in faint hope that He will accept the dare.

Tommy had his hours of frenzy, that I know. He was very young, you will remember, and he knew only too well the life that lay beyond the outer wall—the life to which he had said he was dead. He had his hours of panic when he looked forward over the years

to come, and his hours of desperate planning to escape, to set the blame where blame belonged, and reclaim his birthright. He had his hours (these worst of all) of looking old Tommy Carteret in the wavering, shifting eyes and despising him for the coward he was. But, out of it all, like the blind man new stricken or the maimed new healed, he came, toward the week's end, into the second stage, the slow, hand-wrung bitterness, the apathy that scarcely cares.

It was just as dusk was gathering, of a certain evening, that Tommy set forth, his arm linked with Fate's arm. It had been a hot, still day, but, with the sun's setting, a bit of breeze bore up out of the hollow bottoms and faintly stirred the leaves, stirred those inevitable veils of wreathing mist which hung over the lowland. Tommy stood at his doorstep and turned his face to the breeze.

"A chair here?" he debated, "or a bit of a stroll? A bit of a stroll through the wood-road yonder, I should think." He thought that he himself chose the wood-road.

Now, Half-Breed Hill was not an isolated hill—an island in the ocean of bottom; it was a tiny spur thrust out westward from the great range which trended roughly north and south, so that, walking inward along the spine of his ridge, but a few rods, Tommy leaped the bars of the worm-fence and was in the wood-road. It was a lane flanked with undergrowth and high-arched with trees that met overhead. There were good summer smells abroad, spicy, aromatic smells, a blended essence of dust and green things growing, a scent of spruce and pine, a hint of smoke from a stump burning somewhere far away. It was a church aisle, narrow and high and gloomy, whose roof-beams trembled and

rang with the clamour of the "katydids" making ready for sleep. It was a clamour that filled the air, harsh,

rasping, and discordant.

"Good!" said young Tommy, striding down his darkened aisle. "Good! Keep it up. I like to hear you." Indeed, the noise was so shrill, so unceasing, that it seemed to still even thought. I think that was why Tommy liked it.

A hare scuttled across the lane, almost under his feet, and a little black snake, busied about her affairs, drew back against the fringe of undergrowth in an annoyed manner, and made faces at him as if he had no right there. Then the Fate who walked beside shook his arm gently and said,

"Don't you hear something?"

"What's that?" said young Tommy, turning his head. It seemed to him that, through the all-pervading rasp and drone of the "katydids," he heard another sound, a very different sound, lower down to the right. Listening intently, he held up one hand, as if he would beg those clamorous insects to be still for a moment.

"Somebody's hurt," he said at last, "or maybe it's an animal," and he turned to the right, peering ahead of him through the half-gloom as he went. He found that a narrower lane branched here from the road, an unused lane, one would say, for it was overgrown with turf and little shrubs. A few steps onward he reached a gate, made in the usual fashion—three sliding bars of trimmed saplings—and, just beyond this gate, something white stirred upon the ground and, at intervals, called out in a weak, faint tone.

"A woman!" cried young Tommy. "The devil; a woman!" He vaulted the bars of the gate and dropped

upon his knees beside the huddled figure, which writhed and twisted among the tall grasses. One of the woman's arms was under her, as she lay, and the other arm she was restlessly moving to and fro, beating the air as if she were in a delirium or in unbearable pain. Tommy caught the waving hand in his and bent down, peering into the woman's face.

"What is it?" he said. "Are you hurt? Have you

fallen? What is the matter?"

"The-fence," said the woman in a dry, gasping whisper. "I-tried to-climb-over and I-fell. My skirt caught. I've ben-a-calling for-hours."

"Ah!" said young Tommy cheerfully, "we'll soon have you right again. I expect you struck on your head. Just let me get an arm under your waist to lift you up." He slipped his arm under the woman's body, but, as his hand touched and moved the arm which had been pinioned under her weight, she screamed suddenly and fainted quite away.

"The devil!" said young Tommy again. "That's nasty. There's no water near. You'll have to come to when you're jolly well ready." He sat back on his knees scowling thoughtfully at the motionless figure before him, and at the fence from which the woman had fallen. He noted that the edge of her skirt was still caught upon a splinter which projected from one of the bars.

"Now, let's think it over," he said. You fell forward, didn't you, and that thing held your skirt? You must have pitched on one shoulder. Collar-bone smashed, probably. Have a look." He turned the woman over upon her back, working quickly, before she should recover her senses, and ran his fingers along the shoulder.

"Collar-bone!" he said. "What's to do?" He looked round him frowning and then, with a quick nod, began to gather twigs and small branches heavily covered with leaves. These he made into a sort of cushion, compact but soft. He slipped off the leather belt which he had been wearing and, tucking his cushion of leaves well up under the arm-pit of the injured shoulder, bound the arm fast to the body with the elbow bent so that the hand also lay under the belt across the woman's breast. Then, still kneeling on the ground, he took his broad-rimmed Panama hat and began vigorously to fan the woman, striking her face lightly with the flexible straw. You see, young Tommy had played football in his college days and knew something about injuries.

The woman came to her senses, gasping and twisting her face to avoid the flapping hat with which Tommy

painstakingly belaboured her.

"It-don't hurt so-much, now," she said in a whis-

per.

"No," said young Tommy, "it wouldn't. It's bound up. Think you could manage to walk if I hold you steady? I think we'd best make for my cabin on Half-Breed Hill. It's the nearest house. I'll make you comfortable there and then we'll see about getting you to your home."

The woman gave a quick exclamation when young Tommy said "Half-Breed Hill," and turned her head a

bit to look at him.

"Oh!" she said, "it's—you?"

"Ye-es," said young Tommy. "Yes. I think so.

May I ask whom you mean by 'you'?"

"It's Mr.—Carter," said the woman, "the—city man that's living in Satterlee's house on Half-Breed Hill?" "Quite right," said the city man. "So we—er—have

I had the pleasure of meeting—it's a bit dark here, you know. I hadn't recognised you." He leaned forward, peering through the half-gloom into the face below him, and shook a puzzled head. It seemed to him that somewhere he had seen the face before, but where or when he did not know. The woman was very evidently young, and, doubtless, she must be called handsome.

"I'm Mariana Canfield," she said.

"Ah!" said young Tommy, and, on the instant, the picture of a glaring, sun-baked village street came to him, a row of tilted chairs, a girl, gipsyish and handsome—a cut above these villagers, certainly—an apologetic young man who lagged half a step behind and was chaffed by the jury sitting at Winston's.

"You're one of Dave Canfield's daughters," said Tommy, "the least one. You live on the Dutch Creek

road."

"Yes," said the girl, stirring on the ground before him, and she laughed a little, in the dark, but the laugh ended in a smothered groan.

"I-can walk, I guess," she said. "I'll have to."

Young Tommy took down the bars from the gate and bent once more over Dave Canfield's least daughter. He slipped an arm under her waist and showed her how she could help by putting one of her arms over his shoulder and about his neck. Then he lifted her very gently to her feet and, still holding her so that she should not stumble and jar the injured shoulder, moved slowly up the wood-road toward Half-Breed Hill. At the door of the cabin the steamer chair, admired of the man Jared, lay empty and inviting. Tommy let the girl down into it with care.

"Just wait here a moment," said he. "I must fetch my flask. That pull down through the bottom and up your hill won't be an easy one. You will need a bit of Dutch courage to make it." He brought his flask from the room inside and filled a little glass from it. Then he held the glass to the girl's lips.

"Drink it," he said. "Drink all of it!" But the girl moved her head quickly aside and stared up into his

face with eyes that were full of alarm and fear.

"Drink it!" said young Tommy gently. "It won't hurt you. You'll need it." And, after a moment, the girl's eyes dropped, and she drank the brandy to the end. Tommy, who had a glass of water ready for the cough and splutter he expected, was somewhat scandalised to observe that the strong spirits might have been milk from the easy fashion in which they were despatched.

"Now, to get you home!" he said. "Ready? We shall make it without trouble, I think. It's all right if

we don't jar your shoulder."

They made it, though hardly without trouble. They were forced to halt every few moments for rest on their way down the steep hillside, but the girl made no complaint, in spite of the pain she must constantly have suffered. She was a plucky girl. Tommy noticed, as they stopped once to sit down on a stump, that her forehead was wet and her lips pinched and drawn.

"By Jove, you're brave!" he cried. "It's hurting cruelly, isn't it? By Jove, you're plucky! It won't be so bad now, across the bottom and up the hill. It's the coming down that shakes one." And, indeed, their progress for the rest of the way was much easier, but, as they neared the top of the hill and had only a few more yards to go, the girl all at once stumbled, catching her foot in a vine that she could not see for the dusk, and, swinging half about, fell against Tommy, striking upon her injured arm and shoulder. She gave a quick,

sharp cry, and young Tommy felt her heavy and slack in his arms. She had once more fainted quite away,

with the pain.

He had it in mind to shout for assistance, for he knew that he must be very near Canfield's house, but instead he took the girl across his arms before him—he was very strong, and she was not a large woman—and so carried her across the road at the hill's crest, and in

through the little open gate beyond.

A short path across the unkempt turf led directly to a covered porch at the side of the house, but to the westward, where a door stood open above an uncovered doorstep, a man sat, iron-gray, gaunt, and sullen-eyed, staring idly across the misty bottom. Young Tommy called out to him, "Lend a hand, please!" and turned his steps in that direction. The man rose slowly, and, when he saw his daughter lying slack across Tommy Carteret's arms, he started forward with a little inarticulate cry, and his hard face worked strangely for an instant.

"She's—daid?" he demanded.

"Dead?" said young Tommy. "Nonsense! She has fainted away. She fell off a fence and hurt her shoulder. She has fainted away with the pain. Help me get her into the house, please. I can't hold her much longer."

But the other man drew back a step and stood before

the open doorway.

"I dun'no," he said, looking under his brows at young Tommy Carteret.

Tommy made a little sound of exasperation.

"You're Canfield, I suppose?" he said sharply. "This is your daughter?"

"It was," said the older man, still with his sullen eyes

fixed upon young Tommy's face. "How do I know 'at you-all is a-tellin' the truth?" he said. "What you ben a-doin' with my daughter? What you a-bringin' her hyuh lookin' like she was daid for?"

Tommy laid the girl's heavy body down upon the turf at his feet and over it stared into the other man's black eyes. For a moment or two his mind could not probe the tortuous depths and realise the miserable blackness of the other's thought. This sort of man was quite new to him. But when at last he understood, young Tommy's face was not reassuring to see. It went red and then quickly white, as always when he was very angry, and his chin came forward a bit rather like a bulldog's chin.

"Oh, you blackguard!" said young Tommy into the other man's sullen face. "Oh, you damned blackguard!"

He stooped once more over the still body of Mariana Canfield and, raising it in his arms, bore it in through the open door, shoving the other man aside with his shoulder. It would have been a singularly unfortunate thing for old Dave Canfield to try to stop the stranger just then, and it may be that he knew it. Inside the house a lamp burned dim against one wall, over a cheap cottage organ, and spread a half-light through the little room. Young Tommy laid the girl down upon the floor and pulled a cushion from a near-by sofa to slip under her head. From an inner room a thin, little, bent-over, big-eyed woman appeared and, when she saw what lay upon the floor, started forward with a sobbing cry. Old Dave Canfield from the doorway called her back.

"You stay where you be!" he said harshly. "I want to know somethin' mo' about this hyuh business."

Young Carteret turned upon one knee and faced him for an instant in silence.

"Bring some water and a glass!" he said over his shoulder to the woman, and the woman slunk back into the farther room, reappearing presently with a jug of water and a thick glass. Then she dropped upon her knees on the floor, moaning softly to herself and wring-

ing her hands together.

"Don't be alarmed," said young Tommy; "she has only fainted. We'll have her out of it in a moment." He dipped his fingers in the cold water, sprinkling the girl's brow, and, as she did not immediately respond, half filled the glass and, drawing back a pace, threw the water sharply into her face, while the woman, kneeling beyond, cried out in protest. The girl came to her senses shivering and catching with her hands. After a moment she opened her eyes and smiled faintly at young Carteret.

"I-reckon I swooned," she said.

"I reckon you did," said young Tommy, "but we're safe at home now, and it's all right." He rose to his

feet and spoke to the grim figure in the doorway.

"You will have to have a doctor at once," he said. "The collar-bone is broken and must be set and bandaged and cared for. "Is there a doctor near?" A young lad of ten or twelve had come into the room when Mrs. Canfield brought the jug of water, and he spoke up with shrill eagerness.

"They's a doctor two mile down the Dutch Creek road, suh!" he said. "I'll fetch him. I'll saddle Ben

an' git him hyuh in a hour."

"Right, Oh!" said young Tommy. "Off with you, then! The sooner you can have your doctor man here the better." The lad made for the door, but Dave

Canfield caught him by the shoulder and threw him back into the room. Then he turned lowering to young Carteret.

"Maybe you think 'at this hyuh is you' haouse an' you' fambly," he said, nodding. "Well, it ain't, not whilst I'm alive. You won't send for no doctors, an' you won't do no meddlin' in we-all's affairs. We-all can git along right well without any city man a-bringin' us home in his arms. What you been a-doin' with my daughter? That's what I want for to know."

Young Tommy moved a step nearer and his face was

white in the dim lamplight.

"You will stand aside and let that boy go for the doctor," said he, "or I will first half kill you with my hands, and then throw you off your own hill-top. Your daughter has broken a bone in her shoulder, do you understand? That bone must be set. As for the rest of your infernal nonsense, we will talk that over later. Only, I'll say this much——" But the girl, sitting up on the floor in her mother's arms, interrupted him, and Tommy turned to watch her. Her eyes were fixed upon her father's face, and they were wide and bright, and full of an angry scorn.

"If you was anything but an ornery dog," she said, "you'd shut yo' mouth an' do as this gen'leman tells you. You're a right nice grateful sort of parent, ain't you? I fall off a fence a-goin' ovuh to Miller's for aigs, an' this gen'leman fin's me and ha'f kills himself a-carryin' me home when I've swooned away. Then you stan's up an' growls at him like a mongrel pup. Do you know what he's done? He's saved my life. Ef I'd 'a' had to be out thuh all night long, I'd cert'nly ben daid befo' mawnin'. You are a right fine specimen of man, ain't you?"

Dave Canfield turned abruptly and left the room. He was muttering to himself as he went, but his voice was too low for any of those in the room to make out what he said. As soon as he was out of sight, the young lad started up again.

"I'll fetch the doctor, suh," he cried to Tommy Carteret, and slipped out of the room by another way. Tommy turned once more to the girl, who sat held up in

her mother's arms.

"Never mind about your—father," he said. "I'm sure I don't mind. He didn't quite—didn't quite understand, I expect. There's nothing more to do, now, until the doctor comes. Just keep perfectly still. I should lie down again. If you feel faint, drink a bit more brandy. I'll leave the flask." The girl tried to stammer something about her gratitude and about how sorry she was that her father was a dog, but Tommy stopped her, laughing, and got out of the house as quickly as he could.

Down at the little open gate by the road, one tall and gaunt and sullen waited in the starlight. Tommy was for passing with a curt nod, but the elder man spoke.

"We-uns don't hanker for no city folks down hyuh," he said abruptly. "What you want to come hyuh to live for? You ain't wanted." There was a defiant, uncompromising fierceness about the man that held young Carteret against his will—puzzled him even in the midst of his exasperation. The spirit was something that he could not reach or comprehend. Race-prejudice he had met in many countries. That was easy to fathom. An Englishman despised a Frenchman. A Frenchman insanely hated an Englishman. Italians and Austrians sat at the head of the Adriatic, each watching a chance to knife the other. There was

a reason for all that. It was even a good thing. Intolerant pride in one's own land, intolerant hatred of things foreign, made good citizens. Doubtless there was a reason for this, too, but what reason? Young Tommy could not understand that to this benighted hill man he was more of a foreigner than if he had been a Hungarian or a Greek.

"Look here!" he said shortly. "I bought a piece of land on that hill range yonder, a little while ago. It is my impression that I own it. Do you happen to have any claim on it?" He paused, hoping for an answer, but the elder man only looked at him under his shaggy brows. "If not," said young Tommy, "I presume that it is mine, and I shall live on it, so long as I please, without asking permission of you or of any of your silly friends. I didn't inquire, on coming here, whether or not I was hankered for, and I don't care. It is strictly my own business, I take it, where I live. As for this affair of to-night, allow me to say that your daughter, in expressing her opinion a few moments ago, expressed mine also—expressed it admirably."

He went through the gate, leaving the other man standing there, and, crossing the road, made his way down through the bottom and up Half-Breed Hill to his cabin. He was quite aware that his speech had not been a wise one, or calculated to turn away wrath, but he was angry and didn't care. He laughed a little, climbing Half-Breed Hill in the dark, as the childish absurdity of the whole thing was borne in upon him, but even while he laughed he frowned and shook his head, for, being very young, he liked to find reasons for things, and he could find no reason whatever for this sullen hostility where gratitude should have been. Indeed, he could not have been expected, at that time,

to know that the hostility was too natural and too instinctive to be within the realm of reason at all.

He laughed again as he made lights in the cabin. He was thinking of the girl's angry speech to her father. It appeared that in his unmarried daughter old Dave Canfield had his match and more. It had not been a filial speech, but surely it went to the point, and with

small mincing of language.

"Odd!" said Tommy to himself, "how she dropped into the vernacular when she began to rate the old bounder! She'd spoken very fair English to me. Must have been to school somewhere. Pretty, rather—what?—Gipsy, sort of!—looked rather fine when she was angry.—Jove, what a hole for a girl to live in!—Plucky she was, too.—Ah, well! I shall have to go over there to-morrow, I expect, to inquire how she's getting on.—Only civil.—Then it's over with."

He dropped into a chair before his writing-table, and his eyes met the eyes of the Goddess in the temple gate. It was wonderful to see how swiftly the whole

expression of his face could change.

"Then it's over with," Tommy's lips repeated mechanically, while his eyes smiled toward the temple gate.

Oh, no, it wasn't, Tommy!

## CHAPTER VIII

## BUT THE WHIRLWIND BIDES ITS TIME

Toward midnight he stirred—I think he had been half-drowsing in his chair. I know he had long since forgotten Mariana Canfield and her morose parent—and he filled a pipe, and pulled out from its shelf his green-bound volume of François Villon and read aloud to himself. Villon marched with his mood in these lonely nights. Villon had sounded every depth that a human soul can probe, and he knew a great deal about souls and depths—heights, too, sometimes—a great deal which Tommy, in his solitude, was beginning to learn. It is of common report that one misery cleaves to his brother.

Tommy wasted a futile hour trying to translate into English verse the untranslatable "Ballade des belles Dames du Temps jadis"—what a new Tommy Carteret have we here! Writing verse!—but the snows and the girls of yesterday were not a fortunate subject to hit upon. One's eyes too instinctively rose to the temple gate where yesterday sat and smiled. Aye, young Tommy was learning the depths.

Later, restlessly asleep in his fateful bed, dreams horrible and portentous came to him. A presence stood upright against the gloom at his feet, a stark presence. At first it was dead Mrs. Satterlee with her dead child across her arms, and blank eyes staring. Then, somehow, it became Dave Canfield's least daugh-

ter who looked upon him strangely, and spoke, stretching out her arms, but he could not hear what she said. Old Tommy Carteret came there, bent and furtive-eyed, and slunk away. Hartwell, with his square face and outthrust lower lip, laughed soundlessly and never quite went, for one of his fierce eyes shone through the darkness—a single, sleepless, unwinking, unwavering eye which remained always on watch through many eternities. It was writhing and crouching to escape the calm stare that Tommy awoke with the late morning sun hot in his eyes and an evil taste in his mouth.

The admirable Jared, who must have risen with the dawn, appeared from town as Tommy finished shaving. He bore food supplies and a letter, upon which the master of Half-Breed Hill gazed frowning for some time before he opened it. It was from old Tommy Carteret—his first word, though nearly five weeks had passed. The letter was very like old Tommy-old Tommy at his worst and weakest. The effort its composition had cost him stood out, as it were, in high relief. He spoke of having scarcely as yet left his bed-of great weakness, of the almost fatal shock this dreadful business had inflicted upon him. He hinted vaguely at a fixed intention of setting the matter right as soon as he was well and about. He became slightly hysterical over his son's noble self-sacrifice, and wanderingly bitter at the misjudgment he himself had suffered. There was, in all the pages, no hint of real manliness, no frank acknowledgment of guilt or offer to bear that guilt. Oh, it was old Tommy at his very worst! I have the letter here before me now, and, as I read it, my torn little shreds of love and fondness for the old beau almost turn to bitterness. I cannot quite forgive him that letter. The Carteret strain was so thin in you, old Tommy! You were such a miserable coward! I seem to see in the letter something almost like a querulous complaint, something that half voices a sense of abuse, as if you felt ill-treated. Shame, Tommy! Shame! You couldn't forgive that boy of yours for playing the man while you played the cur, could you?

Young Tommy did not read the letter through to the end. He was in no mood for it. The night had left him rasped and sore. Half-way finished, he threw it aside with an exclamation of impatience, and a voice within him cried scornfully: "Oh, coward! coward!" but he set quick guard over the voice. Old Tommy was, after all, his father. In another mood he would condone this letter as he had condoned other things, laugh at it a little, throw a strong protecting arm across the good old governor's shoulders—this figuratively—for the governor was weak, and a man can't be stronger than he's made.

By the time he had finished his coffee it was nearly eleven o'clock. He had had vaguely in mind a ride for the afternoon—Tommy habitually risked his head in the blazing afternoon sun as no native would have done—and he said to himself, staring across the Little Bottom, that, if he was to make a civil inquiry after his patient of last night, now was the time to be about it.

He set out unwillingly, and with a strong sense of distaste for his errand. In the first place, he had not the slightest interest in the well-being of Mariana Canfield. It had happened to come into his way to do her a service. He had done that service to the best of his ability, and that, to his notion, ended the matter. Further, while his first anger at old Dave Canfield's senseless hostility of demeanour had evaporated, he

was left with a feeling of half-amused disgust, and no desire whatever to find himself again involved in so absurd a scene. Further still, the night, as I have already said, had left him rasped and sore, irritable and nervous—in his darkest humour. The sun lay hot and blazing about him, but to young Tommy's eyes there hung between heaven and earth a gray pall. The sunlight was not good sunlight, yellow and living, but a pallid glare like the calcium on a stage scene.

Most men of a strongly melancholy turn-men separated by some great blow from the world about them and so driven to constant introspection, have an odd and rather melodramatic sense of dual identity. While one man walks through the more or less normal activity of life, doing, more or less normally, the thousand normal things required of him by position and circumstance, another man stands beside, silent, unsmiling, uninterested, watching with passionless eyes. Into this odd sense of duality young Tommy, bereft of hope, face to face with solitude and his own dark thoughts, had come, straight and unhesitating. That dormant strain of melancholy which Arabella Crowley's keen old eyes had seen in him, as a lad, had not been given him idly. Dormant once, it was dominant now. Aye, here was a new Tommy-to my sorrow! Still, I would not have you, from this, think that he went always gloom-invested. Far from it. To the admirable Jared, to Winston, and the jury of tipped-up chairs in the village, he turned a side of good nature, of chaff and easy banter, of patient interest in the face of dull narrative, which was very like the Tommy of old days. It was when alone with his thoughts and imaginings, or when such a night as this just passed

had racked him, that the still mask went on over Tommy's young face, and that other self, silent, unsmiling, uninterested, stood beside, watching with passionless eyes.

He stood this morning, in the dim sunlight, coldly critical, and spoke to the Tommy who stared, scowling,

across the Little Bottom.

"Why trouble about it?" he said. "Why bother to be civil to these heathen? They won't know the difference, anyhow?"

Tommy shook a stubborn head.

"I've got to go," said he. "I expect I'm being civil on my own account, not theirs. Anyhow, I shall go." Still, that, I fancy, was not really Tommy's speech, but Fate's. Tommy was not playing his own hand just then.

"Oh, well! it isn't as if it mattered," said the man who stood beside—wearily indifferent. "Nothing mat-

ters." And Tommy crossed the bottom.

He mounted the opposite hill, and, across the road at its top, let himself in through the Canfield gate. He went at once toward the covered side-porch, for there were people there, and as he came nearer he saw that a sort of pallet had been laid upon four stools, and the injured girl thus brought into the open air. As he approached, a young woman who had been sitting beside the invalid rose and went into the house, and Mariana Canfield turned her head toward him in greeting.

"The doctor said I might be out hyuh," she explained. "It's so hot in the house 'at I couldn't sca'sely breathe thuh." She spoke hurriedly, as if to hide a certain embarrassment, and her face was deeply flushed. Young Tommy, in the midst of polite inquiries as to

her comfort, wondered why.

"I'm right ashamed to have you-all see me like—like this," she went on; "I didn't expect to see any one."

"Like what?" said young Tommy; "with a broken collar-bone? There's nothing to be ashamed of in a broken collar-bone. You couldn't help that."

"Like-this, hyuh!" said the girl, making a little

gesture with her free hand.

"Oh!" said young Tommy coldly. He was rather annoyed, for it seemed to him such a very silly affectation for this sort of young woman to drag in. He

began to be sorry that he had come.

"I shouldn't be disturbed about that, if I were you," he said. "Invalids are expected to appear more or less en déshabille." Then he turned his annoyance upon himself because he had spoken without thinking, and he saw that the girl did not know what he meant by en déshabille.

He was further put out of temper when she began at once to apologise for her father's conduct of last evening. He thought that would far best be let alone.

"I assure you again," he said, a bit formally, "that it doesn't in the least matter. Mr.—Canfield misunderstood. That was all." He dropped into an uncomfortable silence, searching his mind for some adequate method of getting away at once, without seeming

rudely abrupt.

"I expect," he began presently, "that I ought not to encourage you to talk. I expect you ought to be rather quiet for a day or two. I only came over——" He halted in the middle of his sentence, for his eyes happened to meet the girl's eyes, and something in their gaze—a sort of forlorn loneliness, a sort of appeal that was almost piteous, silenced him.

"You ain't-you aren't going to go?" said the girl,

and there was an odd something in her voice that had been in her eyes also. "You aren't going to go right now? I—the doctor said I might talk. I was wishing

you could-stay a little while."

"Why, so I will!" said young Tommy gently. "I—was afraid of tiring you, you know." He smiled across at her as he sat on the edge of the porch, and the girl caught her breath sharply and said "Ooh!" almost as if something had hurt her suddenly. Tommy did not know—he never knew—how wonderfully his face softened and changed when he smiled. People had loved him, before this time, for that sweet boyish smile of his, and in those days his face had been rather boyish at all times, so that the tender smile altered it far less than now.

"It isn't as if I'd anything very pressing to take me back across the bottom, is it?" he went on, and the girl saw that, as he turned his head to look toward Half-Breed Hill, the smile died as quickly as it had come, leaving his face stern and hollow-eyed. "I don't lead a busy life on my hill-top, yonder," he said.

"No," said the girl slowly, watching his averted face. "No, I reckon not. I reckon you ain't—you

aren't very happy, neither," she said.

Tommy's eyes came back, frowning a little, but there was no hint of impertinence in the girl's face, no trace of curiosity or a desire to pry into his affairs only a sort of timid sympathy, a sort of apologetic kindliness.

"Why do you say that?" asked young Tommy after a moment.

"Why?" she said. "Oh, I don't—it's your face, I reckon. You don't look like you were happy. You look like you sat up thinking about things when you

ought to be in baid, a-sleeping. I reckon it's your eyes, maybe. They don't look like you ever laughed."

Young Tommy belied his eyes by laughing, but it was a short laugh and a poor one. There was no

mirth in it.

"You see I'm rather alone in the world," he explained. "I expect I do sit up thinking about things when I should be sleeping. Loneliness isn't gay, very, is it?"

"No," said she, "it isn't."

"I wish-" she said, and paused, hesitating.

"What?" said young Tommy.

"Nothing," said the girl, and turned her eyes, flush-

ing a little, and fell silent.

Young Tommy sat leaning back against one of the slight pillars of the porch, and watched the girl's face, waiting for her to speak. His mood again shifted to a restless desire to get away, to a distaste for talk. Surely he and this hill girl had nothing to talk about. They had not an interest in common. As for her, she doubtless had nothing to say. She was handsome, though, here in this clear morning light. That was beyond denial. She was far handsomer than he had supposed, in her black-haired, big-eyed, gipsy fashion. It was not the type of beauty that young Tommy most fancied. It was a bit too strongly accented, too black and brown, too red-lipped, too broad in cheek and jaw, but undoubtedly it was, in rather singular perfection, the type which universally makes a strong appeal to man-nature. If you were hypercritically minded you might call it blowsy-and therein do it a bit of a wrong-but that it made a fine picture you could not gainsay. These gipsyish women have set the world afire more than once.

Young Tommy, waiting for the girl to speak, watched, noting and approving feature by feature, and, as he watched, the man who stood beside, coldly critical, held, as it were, a finger on his pulse, searched him for a hint of interest or gratification, but the pulse jumped no more quickly, and of interest or gratification there was none. That same gray pall which hung between Tommy and the yellow sunlight hung also between him and Canfield's daughter. It was nothing to him that the girl was handsome and that he had saved her life.

He stirred slightly where he sat, and the girl's eyes turned to him, but dropped again when she met his gaze, and the ready flush came once more up over her cheeks.

"If I knew how," she said, "if there was any way of doing it, I'd try to thank you for—last night. I've been wondering, just now, an' it seems silly, sort of, to try to thank anybody for saving your life. What does thanks amount to?"

"Oh, I say!" cried young Tommy Carteret, "let's drop all that. I don't want to be thanked, you know. Let's just forget it."

The girl shook her head.

"No, we won't forget it," she said. "Leastwise, I won't; but I won't talk about it, neither, if you don't want to. What did you do when I stumbled and swooned away that last time, on the hill-side? The next I knew I was on the floor in the house, hyuh."

"Oh, I carried you the rest of the way!" said young

Tommy. "It wasn't far."

"Carried me!" she cried under her breath, and her eyes widened. "You carried me in your arms? Why, I weigh nigh a hundred an' forty pound! You must be right strong."

"It wasn't far," said young Tommy again, but the

girl continued to stare at him thoughtfully.

"Oh!" she said after a moment, "here comes Rose.

—Mr. Carter, make you acquainted with my sister,
Mrs. Barrows."

The woman who had retreated into the house at young Tommy's approach came out to ask the invalid if she needed anything. She was a rather handsome woman, oddly like her younger sister, but too heavy by twenty pounds, and this extra weight, together with a certain coarsening of the features, gave her the appearance of being much older than the girl on the pallet, though in fact the difference was a matter of but three or four years. Her speech, young Tommy noted, was the vernacular unchastened and uncurbed. If she had ever had any of the training which the younger woman exhibited, when she had herself in hand, it had long since fallen from her like an out-used garment.

"We caint thank you-all enough fo' bringin' Mariana home las' evenin', Mr. Cyartuh," she said; but the

girl broke in, smiling:

"He don't like to be thanked," said she. "He's just stopped me from trying to thank him. I said I

wouldn't talk about it any more."

"No, please don't!" said young Tommy. "Anyhow, I must be going. I'm quite sure that it's not good for you to hold receptions. You need rest and quiet." He took the hand which the girl stretched out to him, and he was vaguely pleased at its warm, firm grip as it closed over his—like a man's hand; but also he was vaguely troubled at the look in her eyes, the same wistful, appealing look that he had seen a few moments before. He was not enough interested

to wonder what it meant, but it made him, for just a moment, a bit uncomfortable.

"Oh, your flask!" she said. "I forgot about it. You left it hyuh last night. Do you know where it is, Rose?"

The other woman looked a bit surprised.

"I thought 'at you had it out hyuh," said she. was on the cheer hyuh this mawnin'."

"No, it must be in the house," said the girl. you look?"

Mrs. Barrows, in spite of young Tommy's polite assurances that it didn't in the least matter, went inside to look, but returned presently to say that the flask could not be found.

"Of co'se it's somewheres," said the girl. "It has ben put aside, I reckon." She looked up into young Tommy's face.

"Couldn't you come over-to-morrow, again?" she said; "just for a minute, if you'd nothing at all to do? They'll have found it before then. I'm-sorry about it. Could you come? I'd be right glad."

"I shall be glad to," said young Tommy, though that was a lie. "Not for the flask, of course, for that doesn't matter, but I shall want to see that you're getting on well." Then he bowed to the two women and went toward the gate. As he passed the corner of the house, he thought he saw a lurking, suspicious figure, iron-gray and sullen, beside the well, but the figure removed itself, and young Tommy went on down the hill-side.

But the two women on the covered porch looked after him until he had disappeared.

"He's shorely polite," said the elder, after a mo-

ment, "jes' like a gen'leman in a book. He kept his

hat off all the time whilst he was hyuh. I wonder—I wonder what made him come to Egypt to live. It ain't as if he aimed to farm. He's gave the wheat, an' oats, an' co'n, 'at Will Satterlee put in, to Jared."

"I reckon he had some good reason for leaving his home," said the girl, staring toward Half-Breed Hill. "I reckon he did something an' had to come away."

"I wonder what?" persisted the other woman, but

the girl shook her head.

"I don't care," she said. "What difference does it make. He's hyuh. That's all that counts."

Her sister looked down at her with sudden keenness.

"Where's that little bottle with the silver fixin's 'at you was talkin' about?" she demanded. The girl slipped her uninjured hand under the covers and pulled out Tommy Carteret's flask.

"I didn't want to—give it to him," she said, and she looked up at the elder woman with a sort of defiance. "I wanted him to come again. He wouldn't have come. I knew by the way he acted. Now he will." The other woman regarded her flushed cheeks with a thoughtful gravity.

"He wouldn' look at you," she said at last, shaking her head. "He'll go back to the city when he's tired of it hyuh. It ain't any use." But the girl stirred restlessly upon her cot, and her fingers tightened over

the silver flask.

"I want him to come again," she said. "I want him to come again."

## CHAPTER IX

## TOMMY FINDS A FELLOW IN EGYPT LAND

I AM firmly convinced that there is, in all the world, nothing so antipathetic to inward gloom as an hour astride a good horse—no sorry nag, mind you, no patient, plodding, weary jade, but a horse fresh, spirited, keen in all senses, eager to leap at touch of spur or crop, ready to shy coquettishly at wind-blown paper or mysterious rustlings from the roadside. I defy you, sir, to maintain your clouded eye, your drawn brow, with this strong, live machine leaping between your knees, throbbing in regular cadence beneath your swaying body. I dare you to say this world is a mean world!

Young Tommy Carteret, early on this afternoon, mounted, in his still, dark humour, and turned toward the long wood-road which swept in a wide curve eastward, leading he knew not where. It was cool and odorous under that high shaded arch, for the sun came only in tiny, dappling flecks. The mare was fresh and keen—Jared on his mission that morning to the village had driven his brother's half-broken colt—and half an hour had young Tommy whistling ribald airs from the late musical comedies—airs which rang oddly down these ancient aisles. Another half-hour had him teasing the mare, and laughing when that lady pretended to be angry, switching at the branches with his crop, as he passed under, sniffing the good wood

smells and thinking how good they were. Aye, it's a cure for inward gloom, an hour astride a horse!

He was quite out of reckoning before he had gone five miles. The road was entirely strange to him, but Tommy intelligently reasoned that all roads lead somewhere, and that there appeared no good reason why this one should be classed by itself. Moreover, it was always easy to ask one's whereabouts at the nearest farm-house. But, just as it was beginning to occur to him that the way back would be as long as the way out, and that he must be at a very considerable distance from home, the wood-road met another road which seemed oddly familiar, and Tommy found himself on the direct route from Half-Breed Hill to the village. His woodland lane had brought him in a great, sweeping half-circle, and he was not more than four miles from his cabin.

There was a house, just here, which had always interested him as he passed it, because it was so different from the slovenly dwellings of the other settlers. It was set well back from the road among trees, a white house with green shutters, in no way pretentious, but it had about it and about the grounds which surrounded it an air of neatness, an appearance of careful grooming, which made it conspicuous. Young Tommy had once asked the admirable Jared who lived here, but Jared—as in the case of most of Tommy's queries—did not know. It was called, he said, the hermit's house. No, he did not know who the hermit was—a foreigner, he thought. The hermit's servant, a closemouthed, silent man, went back and forth for provisions, but the hermit himself was never seen.

Tommy rode slowly past the place. A tall, close-growing hedge of lilac ran along the roadside, and par-

tially screened the grounds within, but through gaps in this he caught glimpses of well-trimmed box borders and gravel paths and raised flower beds. He heard the barking of a dog, as if at play, from somewhere inside the tall hedge, and the voice of a man calling to the dog. Then, all at once, a splendid collie pup broke through the shrubs and ran round and round the mare, barking and leaping as irresponsible pups—before they are taught good manners—are wont to do. Tommy reined in the mare to a standstill and whistled cheerily to the dog, holding out his crop for it to leap to, but, as the pup accepted the challenge, the lilac bushes near by parted, and a man came out to the roadside, calling and blowing a whistle which was set into the butt of his dog-whip.

He looked up at Tommy Carteret with a stiff bow. "I trust my dog has not annoyed you," he said; "it has, as yet, no manners." But Tommy's eyes were staring and amazed, and he did not at once reply. The man was a bit past middle age—fifty, possibly, a gray man, long and lean and thin-faced, with a curiously high, long forehead and a high beaked nose over drooping moustaches of a fashion in vogue a generation ago; but Tommy Carteret's eyes were not fixed upon the

wore. It was a thin jacket of blue flannel, braided at the edge and at the pockets, and on the breast-pocket was worked a certain device in coloured silks.

man's face; they stared at the jacket which the man

"I trust my dog has not annoyed you," said the man

again, patiently. "He has no manners."

"Oh, not at all! Not at all!" said young Tommy Carteret. "I stopped to look at him. He is an uncommonly fine collie." Tommy gave an embarrassed little laugh.

"I'm afraid I was staring," he added. "I beg your pardon. I was taken a bit by surprise. You see, Oxford blazers are not common hereabouts. That is, if they are, I haven't seen them."

The Englishman fixed a glass in his eye and looked up at the younger man, frowning a bit in the white

glare of the sun.

"Ah!" he said, "you will be the gentleman who has come to live in the hill country, yonder. My man has spoken of you. You must have ridden some distance. Your horse is warm. I should be glad if you would come in and spend an hour with me."

"I shall be glad to," said Tommy, simply. "It is some weeks since I have spoken to—to a man of—to

any one but the natives here."

"It is fifteen years," said the Englishman, "since I have spoken to a gentleman. The driveway is below us, yonder. I will walk beside you to show you the

way."

They went some distance down the lilac hedge, by the roadside, and presently turned into a winding drive, box-bordered and sheltered by overhanging trees. Near the house, the Englishman blew a signal upon his dog-whistle, and a man came to take Tommy Carteret's horse—a clean-shaven, alert, silent little man, English like his master. They went through a deep porch, vine-screened, into the house, and a wave of inward sickness swept over young Tommy, and something stabbed sharply at his heart, for it was the sort of house which he thought to have left behind him forever out in that world to which he was dead. No cabin this, dressed with hangings and bric-à-brac and pictures to hide its bare poverty of design, but a true house, with big square rooms, cool and habitable,

with vistas through open doorways of further rooms beyond. It breathed leisure and quiet and undisturbed comfort. There was a faint, pleasant scent of leather bindings—for the walls of the room to which they had come were lined with books. The glare of the afternoon sun was excluded by lowered shades and drawn curtains through which only a dim yellow glow penetrated, cool and grateful to tired eyes, and in this golden light the great library-table and the heavy chairs that stood about the room loomed with a certain massive solidity.

Tommy Carteret drew a quick breath between his closed teeth.

"Is this all perfectly—real?" he said, and there was something in his tone which robbed the words of their flippancy and made the elder man turn to look at him.

"Entirely so!" he said, quite gravely. "I have tried to make myself comfortable here. When one enters upon a lifelong exile, one's first thought is to leave behind everything which could possibly remind one of what is—is past. After a few years, one finds that comfort can do little harm and much good. Man is a creature of habit. He is restless, I find, if deprived of his books and his easy chair." The Englishman had been busying himself, while he spoke, at a little cabinet across the room. He brought glasses, and a small jar of broken ice, and two decanters.

"I have Scotch," he said, "and a dark-coloured American whiskey, made, I am told, from maize. If you have been long in America, you may prefer that. Personally, I do not care for it."

"Scotch, thank you," said young Tommy. "I am unpatriotic enough to dislike American whiskey."

The elder man raised his eyebrows in polite surprise.

"'Unpatriotic?'" he repeated. "You mean that you are an American? I should not have suspected it. You speak English without accent."

"I had English nurses and tutors," said young

Carteret, "and I have lived a great deal abroad."

The elder man filled the glasses and sat down beside the big library table, across from his guest. He bowed slightly as he raised his glass and drank from it.

"To our better acquaintance!" he said. "I count myself fortunate in having been by the roadside this afternoon." Then, for a little space, they fell silent, watching each other's faces across the table as two men, strangers, will, at their first meeting—measuring each other, wondering, I fancy, each one, what strange fate could have brought such a man as the other to exile in this wilderness.

The Englishman's gloomy eyes narrowed with a gleam of amusement, and he laughed gently, fingering

his tall glass.

"I will wager," he said, "that each of us is putting to himself exactly the same questions—making the same surmises. It is a quaint situation—No!" holding up his hand, as young Tommy would have spoken, "No, I do not mean that I should suggest confidences. Those must come much later, if at all. I do not wish to ask questions about you, and I am sure you do not, as yet, care to question me. I spoke because the fact seemed to me amusing."

"I was not," said young Tommy, "about to inflict the story of my life upon you. I was about to suggest that, if you see no harm in it, we might exchange names—just something to go on with," he explained, carefully, "something to call each other by, you know, even if it's only Jones and Robinson." The elder

man laughed again, quietly.

"I must confess," said he, "to having an advantage of you there. I already know your name. My man Peters heard you spoken of in the village, and felt called upon to tell me of your coming to the neighbourhood. I would not have you think Peters a gossip. This was a somewhat exceptional case."

"The name I use here," said young Tommy, "is not my own. For certain reasons, I do not wish my own name to be generally known. I am Thomas Carteret, 2nd, of New York."

The Englishman nodded. "Thank you!" said he. "Carteret! It is a good name. I need not say that it is safe with me. May I return your courtesy? My

name is Henry Carnardon."

Young Tommy said "Thank you," but something stirred in the depths of his memory, something connected with that name Henry Carnardon—Harry Carnardon. Then, all at once, he set down his glass with an exclamation of concern.

"What is it?" asked Henry Carnardon.

"I wish to be perfectly fair," said the younger man. "I do not wish to keep anything from you. It is better, I think. I happen to know quite a bit about you—why you are here and all that. I know your cousin the Earl of Strope, and his son Lord Stratton, who married the first Isabeau de Monsigny. Lord Stratton's daughter, the present Isabeau de Monsigny, and her husband, Ashton Beresford, are old friends of mine. I am sorry, Lord Henry. You will see, of course, that I had to tell you."

The Englishman's hand shook suddenly against his

tall whiskey glass, and a swift flush came across his

livid face and went as swiftly as it had come.

"Yes!" he said under his breath, nodding slowly. "Yes, yes!" and stared for a long time across the darkened room, quite silent, while young Tommy Carteret watched his face with anxious eyes and cursed the faithful memory which had put him in the guise of a spying intruder upon this man's terrible history. But, in spite of his discomfort, he could not but be aware of a very lively interest as he looked at the lean, worn face and cavernous eyes across the table—that interest which must, of necessity, attach itself to the personality of a man whose life has been extraordinarily romantic or tragic.

"Twenty years!" said Lord Henry Carnardon, still under his breath and nodding thoughtfully as he spoke. "Twenty years! And they're marrying and begetting and dying out there in the world just as they used to. Isabeau is dead—God rest her white soul!—and little Isabeau, whom I have never seen, is grown up and married!" A bit of colour had come into his bony cheeks, and there was a certain gleam of excitement in

the eyes he turned upon Tommy Carteret.

"And so you know Stratton!" he said. "And the old Earl—he must be a very old Earl now. His mother and mine were sisters, but my mother was much the younger, which accounts for the thirty years of difference between Strope's age and mine. He had extraordinary physical strength, had he not? I remember the amazing things he could do with his hands. He was vain of his strength, the Earl was. So you know them all, and you and I meet here, in this wilderness, to talk it over! It is curious. I am far beyond feeling surprised at anything, but, if I were not, I expect I should

be rather overcome. Tell me a little about Richard and the Earl. Where do they live nowadays, and do they look as much like twin brothers as they used?"

Young Tommy's surprise overcame his manners.

"Do you mean," he asked, "that you hear nothing from them at all? Is it possible that they do not write to you?" The Englishman shook his head with a little faint smile.

"When I left the world," said he, "I closed the door behind me, and-there is no key. You arepardon me!-too young to remember the wide publicity that Sicilian affair had in the newspapers. My disappearance was necessary, and anything like a resurrection, to phrase it so, would be most unfortunate for a number of people. Neither the Earl nor Richard knows whether I am alive or dead. One day I shall die, very swiftly. Do you know the Sicilians? They are banded together by a sort of spirit, an idea, an informal brotherhood for resistance and revenge which foreigners wrongly believe to be an organisation. It is called the Mafia. When I die, it will be at the hands of some Sicilian or two or three, who will have discovered me here. They have been a long time about it, a long, weary time, but one day they will come."

Carnardon had leaned back in his arm-chair with his eyes upturned and a small whimsical smile at his lips. He stared into the shadows of the ceiling, as if he saw a picture there and as if the picture amused him.

"One day," he said, "Peters will come to tell me that it is time to dress for dinner, or that the accounts are ready for looking over, or that the geraniums are not doing well, and he will find me, face down here, on the table, with a long, straight knife in my back, and, pinned to me by the knife—skewered, as it were—a bit

of paper with a single word written on it. Then a certain account will have been settled which should have been settled long since, and an historic incident with which, I take it, you are familiar will have been closed."

Tommy Carteret made a little overwrought exclamation. It did not seem to him possible that a man could look forward to such a fate with such absolute lack of any emotion, but as Carnardon lapsed again into silence, and he watched the lean face relax into its habitual mask, seared, lined, incredibly hollow-eyed, he began dimly to understand. He thought of what the man's youth had been, of his family, his connections, his diplomatic ambition, and he tried to picture the five years of hunted exile in Eastern seas and the subsequent fifteen dreary years here in this hermitagetwenty years of enduring, and hoping for death to come. It made his own estate seem, all at once, trivial and insignificant and unimportant by contrast. It made him feel curiously young and untried—like one playing at grief-when he looked at this man and realised what he had endured.

"I should not have borne it," he said abruptly, and did not know that he had spoken aloud until the other's eyes met his. "I should have ended it long since. There is always suicide to resort to."

But Carnardon shook a slow head.

"I have the strongest possible prejudice against suicide," said he. "It is my one unalterable moral scruple. I do not believe that a man has a right to take his own life under any circumstances—except, of course, by way of sacrifice, when by giving his life he can save a more valuable one. Don't suppose," he said, smiling across the table at the younger man,

"don't suppose that I have not fought and argued it out at length, alone here. I have sat at this table for hours which would amount in sum, I fancy, to months, with a pistol before my hands, stating the question and arguing each side of it with all the skill I possess, hoping against hope that one day I might be able to argue down my scruple and end it all with the pistol. One has time for a great deal of argument, my friend in twenty years."

my friend, in twenty years."

"I am six-and-twenty," said young Tommy Carteret, stirring his glass and staring down into it. "In twenty years I shall be six-and-forty. In twenty more I shall be six-and-sixty. I come of a long-lived race, and—there is no one to slip a knife into my back and set me free." The Englishman opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again, shaking his head as if words seemed to him idle. And he looked at the young American with a grave, compassionate understanding as one who stood at the beginning of a path which he himself had travelled and knew in all its bitterness.

"A lifetime," he said presently, "is a long matter. If I were disposed to offer counsel, and you disposed to listen to it, I should say, do not look ahead. Treat your life like a book. Read only the page that is before you. There may be surprises in the next chapter. One can never know.—Will you tell me something about Strope and Richard Stratton? I look back upon the life I lived with them and with others, twenty—thirty years ago, in a rather odd fashion. I visualise it, as it were. It is as if I stood far up a dark corridor through which I might not retrace my steps, and, looking backward, saw at the corridor's end a square of sunshine with a garden and many beautiful things, and a group of people in the sunshine whom I used to know

and care for. It is a strange and fantastic picture, but one finds himself given to fantasy when he is alone for years together. I never leave my grounds here, you know. I have not left them or spoken to a human being, save Peters, since I first came."

So young Tommy spoke at length about the old Earl of Strope and about Richard, Viscount Stratton his son, and about Isabeau de Monsigny, whom people called the most beautiful woman in Europe—she was Lord Stratton's daughter by his French wife, the Monsigny heiress. He told about Château Monsigny, near Versailles, where all the family lived in good, old, almost feudal, fashion, and where he himself had often stayed. And the Englishman, who had lighted a pipe, listened intently, nodding and puffing great clouds of smoke. There was an unwonted light in his deep eyes, and that little dull flush had come again to the bony cheeks, glowing strangely above their haggard markings.

"You are very good!" he said when, after an hour or more, young Carteret stopped. "In some faint fashion you will imagine how all this interests me. You come by way of a messenger from a world I had not expected to see again, and I have seen it through

your eyes. You are very good."

"I am fortunate," said young Tommy, "in being able to do you a service. I must be going, I fear. It is nearly six o'clock, and my man will have my dinner—to use a good word for a poor thing—ready for me at seven."

"I was on the point of asking you," said Henry Carnardon, "to do me the honour of dining here with me. I hesitated because I am so well aware that I can offer little in the way of entertainment and nothing at all in the way of gaiety. I am a bird of dark plumage, Mr. Carteret. I croak: I cannot sing, for I have forgotten how. It must be a dinner, as it were, of funeral baked meats, but, grave or gay, I shall be glad if you will join me. We will dine at eight, and, if you do not care to return home meanwhile, we will make it a very informal meal, and not dress.

"Why, thank you!" said young Tommy, "I will come with pleasure—very great pleasure. Perhaps I would best return home, meanwhile, though. I must give some instructions to my man Jared. At eight, then?"

The man Peters brought the mare to the side porch. It gave Tommy another little homesick pang to see him stand at the mare's head as a groom should, and touch his cap as he released the reins. And the master of Half-Breed Hill rode briskly homeward, through the late-afternoon sunlight, with a boyish sense of excitement over the evening to come. He turned the mare over to Jared with instructions to remove the saddle and put her into the cart, as he should be wanting to drive later on. Then he went indoors, still with that sense of gleeful excitement, and burrowed to the bottom of a large trunk, where lay folded his long-untouched evening clothes. He remembered, as he pulled them out, with just what a sorry grin he had included them among his other things when packing this trunk in Washington Square. As if one would ever want evening clothes in that solitary hell to which he was booked!

"Pretty bad!" said young Tommy, shaking his head over the wrinkles and creases in the black cloth. "Altogether too bad! Ass! Why didn't I hang the things up instead of leaving them folded there?" He wandered disconsolately out into the kitchen, and his

clouded eye fell upon an iron which stood heating at the back of the cooking-stove. The admirable Jared

had been ironing table-cloths.

"Every man his own valet!" said Tommy Carteret firmly, and swept a litter of encumbrances from the long deal table. He brought out the coat and trousers and dampened them with a brush dipped in water; then, laboriously and with awkward, unaccustomed hands, he pressed the many creases and wrinkles from the cloth till both garments hung smooth and flawless.

"I never thought I should come to that," he said, mopping his reddened face, "but you never can tell. Anyhow, I shall look respectable, now. I couldn't

have gone in the rags as they were."

An hour later he stood immaculate at the cabin door, demanding his cart, and the stricken Jared leaned feebly against a near-by post and said "Hell!" in an awed whisper, several times.

Still an hour later, in that house on the village road locally known as the hermitage, two gentlemen sat down to dinner where one had sat alone each night for

fifteen years.

"This morning," said Lord Henry Carnardon, adjusting his eyeglass, "I should have said that the resurrection of the dead or the failure of the solar system were, either of them, more probable of occurrence than the coming of a dinner guest to this house. Yes, the unread pages hold odd surprises for us—Thank God! I hope that we may sit together often. I have been thinking, do you know, of what I said to you two hours ago, about the inevitability of a cheerless and funereal meal. I am rather of the opinion that I was mistaken. It may be that I am a bird of dark plumage—that I croak instead of singing, but on this

occasion I feel bursts of song rise to my throat. I feel an unwonted sense of gaiety. Alas! gaiety will sit awkwardly upon me, no doubt!" And, indeed, as the dinner progressed, and the wine-glasses were filled and refilled many times over by the attentive Peters, an odd and wintry gaiety seemed to infold the man, where it sat, as he had prophesied, a bit awkwardly as if from very long disuse. His speech became freer and more colloquial.—Young Tommy had previously noticed in it an unusual correctness, a tinge almost of pedantry, a disinclination to abbreviate, as if the man had, for many years, talked little and read much. He sat forward, elbows on the table, and told jokes and humorous stories a generation old, and laughed over them, gustily, like a man who has almost forgotten how to laugh. He emptied his wine-glass as soon as it was refilled, with quick, eager gulps.

"I commonly limit myself," he apologised, "to a half-bottle of Bordeaux with my dinner, changing to this Burgundy once or twice a week by way of variety; but, to-night, we celebrate. I shall drink until I lose the sense of discrimination. That is a safe barrier to set up. There is a certain stage which one reaches after slowly drinking a moderate quantity of good wine, and which is the climax of mental and bodily exhilaration. It is nothing like drunkenness; it is not even the introduction to drunkenness. It is the point at which a man's serenity and wit are both at their height. I have known men who deliberately induced the state when they had a bit of work to do which would demand the nicest delicacy and the finest intuition of which their brains were capable. I think that, if I could reach that stage to-night, I should drop twenty years

out of my life as one drops a coat from his shoulders.

It might be interesting."

It certainly would have been interesting. It was scarcely less so to watch the man, as young Tommy Carteret watched him, drinking swiftly and hopefully with a look in his brightened eyes of eager expectancy and keen excitement. It was as if he held a finger on his mental pulse, hoping for the beat which would not come. His face flushed ruddily, and his sunken eyes took on a certain hard glitter, but after a time he shook his head and sighed.

"I am afraid it is useless," he said. "I seem to be spirit-proof. This is a rather full-bodied Chambertin, but it will not affect me in the least. I am sorry. They say that melancholy men are much less easily affected by drink than others. That may be true. If it is, I suppose nothing could make me drunk—nothing." He nodded to the quiet servant, who once

more filled the wine-glasses.

"We will drink one toast," said Henry Carnardon, and rose to his feet. "Two dead men standing up in their graves and drinking a toast! Ha, ha! Each of us to one woman out yonder in the world." He raised his glass, looking over it into the shadows across the room, and, in the candlelight, Tommy Carteret saw his eyes widen slightly and stare as if he saw something or some one in the shadows. Then he spoke a name, under his breath, as if he did not know that he spoke, and drained the wine-glass to its dregs. The name he had spoken was "Isabeau." Was it the young Isabeau who lived with her husband at Château Monsigny? Carnardon had never seen her. The dead Isabeau, then, her mother? She had been Lord Stratton's wife. Mystery here! Odd things come to

the surface sometimes, just with the speaking of a name—come to the surface and disappear again like the face of a drowned man in a tide-way.

But Tommy Carteret raised his glass high, and his mind flashed back to a certain night in Washington

Square.

"God save the Queen!" he said in a whisper, but the strength went from his lifted arm, and the red wine

spilled as his hand dropped.

"I cannot drink that toast," he said. "There is no woman to whose name I can drink." The other man, who had slipped again into his seat, raised dull, vacant eyes to him.

"Did you speak?" said he. "I beg your pardon;

I did not hear. I was dreaming."

"It was nothing," said Tommy Carteret, and sat down a bit heavily. "Nothing. I spoke aloud to myself. One who is much alone forms a habit of

thinking aloud."

"That is true!" nodded the other man. "I go about my quiet, daily activities here talking, talking, arguing questions aloud, as busily as if I had a listener—far more busily, indeed. Sometimes the absurdity of it occurs to me, and I stop to laugh at myself."

"We take things rather alike, I should think," said

Tommy Carteret.

"Yes," said the elder man thoughtfully. "Yes. Too much so.—Altogether too much so," he repeated. He leaned forward across the table, frowning and

watching the other's face.

"I look at you to-night," he said, "and in you I see myself of twenty years ago. What you have just said is even truer than you realise. We have temperaments surprisingly alike, and Fate, or our familiar

devils, or whatever you choose to call the guiding force, has chosen to put us into the same living death. What I have endured for these twenty years, you are about to experience. You will not go mad; you will not attempt to kill yourself or do any other rash, desperate thing. You will sit tight and drink the cup I have drunk before you, just as I have drunk it, deliberately tasting to the end each bitter drop and finding the last drop as bitter as the first. Now, I speak of this for a reason, and I know you will not think me impertinent or prying or curious if I go into your affairs a bit. Our lives seem, for the moment, to run side by side. I take it for granted that you have come into this exile for the strongest possible reason—that it is for no whim or passing mood, and that you look forward to death as the only escape?" He spoke as if in question and waited a moment.

"Yes," said Tommy Carteret. "Oh, yes! you may

take that for granted. There is no escaping."

"Then," said the other man earnestly, "do as I have not done. Make some interest for yourself. Do something! Do not sit, as I have sat, staring into space and counting the hours of the day. Make some interest for yourself. Farm your land. Buy machinery and experiment. Men become interested in such things. In any event, it will fill your days. Make friends with the people about you. Marry one of these girls I see driving or riding past, to and from the village. Better a thousand times drop to their level and live a man's life than sit outside it in your solitary hell."

Young Tommy gazed at the man across the table with an amazed stare, and he broke into a short,

incredulous laugh.

"Marry!" he said, staring. "I marry?—one of these

farmer women? You do not know what you are saying.

You must be mad. Oh, it is quite impossible!"

"I am not mad," said Henry Carnardon patiently, "though I have, at times, been near it. I know very well what I am saying, and I know that it is wise. Who should know better than I? I rather expected you to take it in this fashion, but you will think of it again, later on, when things have become unendurable, and, when you do think of it, remember that I urged it strongly, and remember what I have gone through."

Tommy Carteret shook his head. "I might, one day, come to try farming," said he. "I can imagine being driven to that, in time, but never to marriage. There are rea—Oh, no! that is quite out of the

question."

"I did not say that it would transmute your hell into a heaven," warned the elder man. "I did not claim that it would prove a state of bliss, but that it would take your mind from yourself."

"Still, if one feels as you do," argued young Carteret, "it is never too late to try the experiment. You will not be much over fifty, I should think. Why not marry, yourself? You may live thirty or forty years, still."

But the other man shook his head with an embar-

rassed little laugh.

"I have a presentiment, absurd, if you like, but quite fixed," he said, "that I shall not live this year out. Two or three things have helped, I expect, to strengthen the idea. When I was born, the local wise-woman, a Meg Merrilles sort of old party, predicted that I should live a half-century and then die violently. Then, much later, a certain German in London, who had made a study of the lines in one's hand, examined my palm one day.— He was quite the fad, I remember. Every one went to

him.—Are there such people nowadays?—He also told me that I should die violently when I had completed my half-century. Odd! What?"

"And your age?" demanded young Carteret. "Your

age, now?"

"I shall be one-and-fifty on the first of next September," said the Englishman, smiling.

Young Tommy sat back in his chair with a quick

breath.

"There are thousands of those palmist chaps nowadays," he said presently. "They are regarded as the most pitiful of quacks, like the seventh daughter of the seventh daughter, who tells you your fortune with a pack of cards, all for the sum of one dollar."

"Oh, I dare say my notion is quite absurd!" said the Englishman. "But the belief is strong in me. One cannot laugh away a superstitious conviction. It persists even while admitting that it is foolish. Shall I have

Peters bring you more coffee?"

"No, thank you," said young Carteret. "I must be off for home. It is late."

"Yet we, neither of us, look forward to a busy day to-morrow, I should think," smiled the other man.

"No," said Tommy. "Still, habit is strong. One is in the habit of spending the latter part of the night in sleep. You will never ask me to dine with you again if I keep you up all night.—Yes, thank you, I will take a cigar to smoke as I drive homeward."

Out in the road, as the mare trotted briskly away through the moonlight where shadows sprawled, sharp and black, he gave a last look over his shoulder—a wistful look, at the huddle of trees where yellow-lighted windows gleamed from the blackness. It seemed to him that every clicking step the mare took

bore him farther away from something human and cheering and homelike-farther into gloom and loneliness, an outer void. His mind flashed before his eyes a picture of the cabin on Half-Breed Hill, its box-like proportions, its poor attempts at comfort, and he gave

a quick shiver of distaste.

"Twenty years!" said a voice within him. "Forty -fifty!" But there was good blood in young Tommy, good, red, fighting blood. He pulled himself up with a jerk, stiffening his shoulders; and, tunneling the dense gloom of a wood-road behind the mare's steady feet, he lifted a courageous voice in song. He sang, I do not know why:

"Here's to good Old Yale! Drink her down, Drink her down!"

and he sang it all the long way homeward until he pulled the mare up at the cabin door.

#### CHAPTER X

## A WENCH WITH CALLING EYES

Mariana, of the Dutch Creek road, sat upon her doorstep fronting the golden west. The last blaze of the sun, before it slipped behind those far hills, crimsoned her face and filled her level eyes with strange lights—green lights, golden-tawny lights, red lights. She bore one arm still in a bandage and sling, but the pallor of illness was gone from her, and the flush of life and health come back. She sang to herself, under her breath, not, it would seem, for joy, but a sad little song with an odd crooning melody, which she had heard somewhere and remembered. She did not know all the words, only bits here and there, but the song seemed to chime with her mood, for she sang it over and over again, softly—under her breath.

The man who had come across the Bottom halted to look, for Mariana made a picture better than she knew. There was something in the pose—knees drawn up, arms thrown out straight together over them, shoulders and head drooping a bit forward, with two great braids of black hair falling to each side; and those wide, level, tragic eyes that stared; and the golden blaze of sunlight full in Mariana's dark face.

"Aah!" said the man who had come across the Bottom, softly to himself. He had not forgotten that pictures are beautiful. And he came a step nearer, softly still, so that she should not hear him until he spoke:

"'He cometh not,' she said.
She said: 'I am aweary, aweary—
I would that I were dead.''

Mariana turned with a shivering sob.

"Oh!" said she, meeting his eyes, and she did not smile or offer any greeting or tell him that she was glad to see him. And by that he should have known.

"Who-told you that?" she said.

"A woman in a poem," said Tommy Carteret, and came forward to sit down on the turf at Mariana's feet; "a woman of your name. You looked so very, very doleful and tragic, just now, that it put it into my head."

"Oh!" said the new Mariana again. "I thought you meant—I didn't understand. Tell me about the woman with my name. My mother got my name out of a book of poems, but the book was lost. I reckon it might be the same woman. Tell me about her."

Tommy Carteret shook his head.

"I can't tell things," said he. "I haven't a tongue. It appears that the other Mariana spent a great deal of time waiting for some chap to turn up, and the chap didn't come. It appears that she lived in a rather rum old house, quite alone, and heard the rain beat outside, and the shutters bang, and mice and things squeak in the walls, while she sat up nights waiting for this chap, of whom I spoke, to come to her."

"I reckon she—cared a heap about him," ventured

the new Mariana, sombre-eyed.

"She must have, I fancy," said young Tommy, "to sit up weeping and wailing for him. It's all very damp and mournful, isn't it? What?"

"I reckon," said Mariana, with her eyes to the blazing west, "I reckon I know how she felt. Did he come?"

she demanded.

"I fancy he didn't," said young Tommy. "But I don't remember. Maybe," he suggested charitably, "the chap didn't know she wanted him to come, or maybe he was dead or something." The working of a fresh and crude mind was beginning to amuse him. He knew so little about this type of mind! It was like telling fairy stories to very young children, he thought, and listening to their serious and ingenuous commentary. You see, he knew so very little about minds.

"No," decided the new Mariana gravely, "I don't reckon he was daid. I reckon he—just didn't care enough to come. Likely she wasn't good enough for him. Likely she lived in the—country—it sounds like that kind of a house—and he was somebody, oh, a great

lot finer than she was!—and he didn't care."

Tommy laughed.

Oh, Tommy! Tommy!

"It was only a poem, you know, after all!" he said,

but Mariana regarded him sad-eyed.

"I reckon it might have been true," said she. "I reckon it happens like unto that—sometimes." And she repeated, softly to herself, the lines Tommy had quoted:

"'He cometh not,' she said.
She said: 'I am aweary, aweary—
I would that I were dead."'

Tommy stirred uneasily upon the turf, and his brows drew into a little frown.

"Don't!" he said. "You—you say it as if you meant it—as if you understood it. What do you know about waiting for some one who does not come? You can't know."

"Can't I?" said the girl, turning her eyes upon him. Tommy looked away, for they were such eyes as the other Mariana might well have had-after very long waiting. The thing was becoming just a bit strained and theatrical, and much more serious than he had intended, so that he felt a quick sense of distaste.

They were extraordinary eyes, though! He could not deny that, and he sat quite silent, for a moment or two, watching the girl's face and grumbling to himself, for that this child—he knew she was under twenty should be able to look like a queen in tragedy, like a woman who has lived and lost and suffered all that life holds. He did not know that eyes betray capacity, not experience. How should he have known it?

"Can't I?" said Mariana again, sombre-eyed.

"Why?"

Tommy Carteret made a gesture of irritation.

"You're young," he said; "you have not suffered

enough. You're too happy to know."

"Happy!" said the girl, with a little scornful laugh. "Happy!" She swept a gesture round her which seemed to include the mist-wreathed bottom beneath her feet, and the far hills, and the slovenly house before which she sat. "Happy, here?" she said. "You know what this place is like. You know what the people are—only you don't really know. You saw my father that night when you brought me home."

"Ah, yes!" said Tommy Carteret stiffly. "Of course, I can't enter into a criticism of your father with you."

"Why not?" she demanded in frank surprise. Here was a standard she did not comprehend. "Why not? He criticised you hard enough. What difference does it make if he's my father or not? It's all the worse if I have to live with him. Do you reckon a girl is going to be happy here? Maybe I was happy enough, because I didn't know anything better, till they sent me down to

school in Effingham. I didn't stay a year, quite, but I got a chance to see what people are like, out away from here, and how they do things. Then, just when I'd begun to learn, I had to—come back."

She turned upon Tommy Carteret fiercely, spreading

out her arms.

"What's going to become of me?" she cried. "What am I going to do? They won't let me go away again. They say it gave me—airs; airs! They say it made me despise my home and my family and—all that. Well, it did! I do despise them. They're trash, and I know it. What's going to become of me? Am I going to marry one of these—these hill farmers and settle down to be a slave? You've seen these men and their wives. Have I got to be like that? I'd-rather kill myself. I'd rather run away and go to some city. I'd rather be anything, any kind of a woman. And you say I'm happy!" The girl's eyes were very bright and her cheeks very flushed, and the bosom of her cheap calico frock lifted and fell swiftly, but she did not begin to weep and bewail her woes as another type of woman would have done. She blazed rebellion from every inch of her tense body, and rebellion in her was rather splendid to see.

"I say!" broke out Tommy Carteret awkwardly. "I say, you know, I'm—sorry. I wish it didn't have to be. I wish there were something—well, there isn't anything one can say, is there? I'm sorry, that's all. I'd never thought of you as being lonely. I didn't suppose you felt like that about it. I've been so much wrapped up in my own silly troubles—a chap is, you know—that I expect I didn't see. No," he said. "I shouldn't like to think of your marrying one of these hill people and settling down to slavery. Somehow, it's

not what you—not what you were made for."

"No," said the girl, "it ain't."

"Let's think it over a bit!" said young Tommy after a pause. "You want to get away. You want to go where the people are civilised people—where there's something to do and see and think of beyond the crops and the weather and the shortcomings of your neighbours. It's not gay here, one must admit, and a young girl has a sort of inherent right to gaiety. She has a right to the fun that other girls in happier places are having every day of their lives. You never can have that sort of fun the second time. If you're cheated of it when you're a girl it's lost to you forever."

"I know! I know!" said the girl, leaning toward him through the pale dusk. "I saw them in Effingham—the girls that were just having a good time—nothing to trouble them, nothing to think of but just having a good time. I wish I'd never gone; it's spoiled every-

thing."

"I wonder," said Tommy Carteret, staring at her thoughtfully. "There must be a way. It's horribly unfair to chain you to these hills. You don't belong to them. There must be some way." He fell again into silence, staring at the girl who sat across from him, and the girl was silent too, waiting, with her great, sombre eyes fixed upon Tommy's face, and her lips parted.

"I fancy," said young Tommy, "that there must be plenty of people—I fancy I know people, who have plenty of—money, heaps more money than they need, and who would be glad to spend some of this money in doing a good piece of work. I dare say I know several nice old women who'd be overjoyed if they should find that they could insure a girl's having a good time at a very tiny cost to them." He had been looking away as he spoke, but just here he stole a glance at the girl's face.

He was afraid that he had put the thing altogether too boldly, too straight from the shoulder, and he was much annoyed with himself for his lack of finesse. He half expected a burst of angry resentment and a curt refusal to listen to such a scheme, but he might have spared himself the distress, for the girl's eyes were still fixed upon his, sombre as always, but nevertheless full of a certain wondering excitement, a certain eagerness.

"They would be keen," he went on; "these old women of whom I spoke would be keen to give a young girl, who was being cheated out of her fun, a chance to have that fun to her heart's content. They're—you see, they're very kindly old parties, and they were once girls themselves. You must know some people in this town-What did you call it? Effingham?-who would be glad to take you in as a paying guest, sort of. Then you'd have plenty of pretty clothes and all the things a girl likes, and—and—well, the rest of it you could do yourself, couldn't you?

"There's my plan," he said, nodding at her cheerfully. "It makes a lot of people happy—a girl because she finds a chance to lead a girl's life—an old woman or two because she can do some good in the world with a bit of her idle money—and a little circle of people in this-what's its name-town, because they've acquired something new and beautiful and interesting. There's my plan! What do you

think of it?"

"Oh!" said Mariana, of the Dutch Creek road, softly. "Oh! Oh! There couldn't be any such ladies," she said, twisting her hands together before her. and she stared across, through the dusk, at the man's face anxiously, with straining eyes, to see if he could be so cruel as to joke.

"Do you—mean it?" she demanded. "Do you reckon there really are ladies who would do thatladies who haven't ever even seen me? Oh, there

aren't, there aren't! You're poking fun at me."

"No," said Tommy Carteret. "I'm quite serious. I wouldn't chaff about that sort of thing. I think the women could easily be found. I'm certain of it. It's you who are doing them the favour, you know. They're always eager for such a chance, being, as I said, kindly old parties. Oh, yes! I mean it, right enough. seems to me an excellent plan. I shall sit back on my hill-top yonder and think of you having such a very jolly time of it in-what's its name town, and I shall feel the warmest glow of virtuous satisfaction I've ever known when I realise that I had a hand in the thing myself.—I shall feel," he said, laughing gently, "a sort of first cousin to the fairy-godmother person who looks after Cinderella and the other unappreciated maidens in the story-books. Oh, I shall be immensely proud, you may be sure!" He halted, all at once, as he heard the girl move quickly in her seat, and heard her give a swift, smothered exclamation. He met her eyes, and it seemed to him that their eager excitement of a few moments before had altered to something like terror and dismay.

"What's the matter?" he demanded anxiously. "Don't you like my scheme? It's such a very nice scheme! You needn't mind accepting favours from old women, you know. It isn't as if they were men. A woman may take anything from another woman.

What's the matter?"

"You-" said Mariana, of the Dutch Creek road, in an odd, low voice, "you-sit back on your hill-top? You mean—you're not going, too? You mean that

you'd be-here-all the time?"

"Here?" said young Tommy. "Of course, here. I shall never leave my hill-top. I'm here for always." And a quick little flash of bitterness passed across his face and was gone again, like a passing shadow.

"I don't come into it at all," he said. "I only start the wheels going, you see. Oh, no! I can't leave my

hill-top."

"I think," said Mariana, still in her odd voice, "I think I'd rather not go. I reckon it couldn't have been done anyhow, don't you? I'd rather stay." And still Tommy did not see, though the girl's eyes troubled him vaguely and set him to wondering.

"I'm sorry," he said. "It seems to me rather a pity. You'd best think it over. Don't say yes or no

just now, to-night. Think it over."

"I'd rather stay here," she insisted, and looked away. "It—it isn't so terribly bad." She put out a hand quickly and touched his arm, as it were in appeal.

"Please don't think I-don't thank you," she said. "I-you're very good. I take it kindly of you, but I'd -I didn't understand. I'd rather not go. No one," she said, "ever cared enough before, whether I was happy or not, to want me to be happier. I wish I-

It's good of you."

"Oh, never mind that!" said Tommy Carteret. "That doesn't matter. And we won't say anything more, if you'd rather not, about your going away—unless you change your mind, that is. We'll talk about something else. How does the shoulder get on? I've not said a word about it, and that is very uncivil of me. You're such a strong-looking young person that one never thinks of your having anything the matter with

you. You'd get a lot more sympathy if you looked more like the ordinary invalid."

"It doesn't bother much now," she said. "I shall have it out of the sling in a few days. It hasn't pained me hardly any after that first week in bed. It's only awkward because I can't do anything but sit around. I can't even dress myself."

The click of a horse's hooves and the roll of wheels in the road beyond halted, and a man's voice called out and was answered by another man's voice from the other side of the house, out of sight of the two at the westward doorstep. There followed conversation, and presently the two voices approached the corner of the house. Mariana drew herself up with a frown of displeasure.

"It's Joe Borral," she said. "I'm sorry he's come."

Two men rounded the corner, and Tommy Carteret rose to meet them. One was old Dave Canfield, coatless and unshaven, furtively sullen of countenance. The other was the young man who had, a fortnight since, shambled through the village street a half-pace to the rear of Miss Mariana Canfield, to the delight of certain appreciative gentlemen at Winston's. He was in his conquering raiment. His hair was pasted down over his not over-high brow in two beautiful and regular curls, and, for the better exposition of these, he wore his broad hat on the back of his head like a little girl out with her nurse for a morning in the park. Further, he was very smart with a red silk handkerchief knotted about his collarless neck, over a boiled shirt, and with purple embroidered braces which had patent buckles of glistening nickel.

Old Dave Canfield stopped short when he saw the man who stood beside his daughter. He looked at young Carteret for a lowering instant and said "Oh!" Then he turned abruptly and went back round the corner. The two had exchanged no greetings or further repartee since the night of Mariana's dramatic homecoming two weeks previous to this. Although Tommy had crossed the Bottom perhaps half a dozen times, the other had remained carefully aloof. He lacked something of the famous spirit of American hospitality.

The young man of the purple braces advanced with an engaging smile and said "Howdy" to the girl, who sat on the westward doorstep. Mariana did not rise, and she exhibited none of the common forms of joy, but she did betray a very obvious uneasiness and discomfort.

"Mr. Borral, make you acquainted with Mr. Carter," she said in the polite convention of the land. "Mr.

Carter, Mr. Borral."

Mr. Borral took Tommy Carteret's hand, grinning widely, and shook it with a limp grace.

"You-all must be the city man 'at's livin' in Satter-

lee's house," he said.

"Yes," said young Tommy, "I live in Satterlee's house on Half-Breed Hill. It's not a bad little cabin."

"I reckon," pursued the tactful Mr. Borral happily, "I reckon you-all is bound to learn us farmers how to act like city doods."

"What makes you reckon that?" inquired Tommy

Carteret; but the girl cut in hurriedly.

"Won't you sit?" she said to the newcomer. "There aren't any chairs out here, but you can sit on the door-

step, if the grass is too damp."

"I reckon the grass won't give me no measles nor consumption," said Mr. Borral wittily. "I can stand it if he can," indicating the other man, with an eloquent thumb.

"I reckon you have to be right careful of them kind of clo'es," he sympathised, staring hard at the inoffensive flannels, of London origin, which incased Tommy Carteret. "They must come high." There was no offense in his tone, only untutored curiosity and a certain unenvious approval—as one might approve the plumage of a blue-jay without desire of emulating it. But Tommy went red with embarrassment, and the girl once more sprang to the rescue.

"You don't seem like you were very much interested in my broken shoulder," she complained to Mr. Borral.

"Most people would have asked how I did."

"Why, sho!" said Mr. Borral, lost in humiliation. "So they would! So they would! I reckon I'd plumb forgot. You don't look like you had broke nothin'."

"Well, I have!" said the girl resentfully, and shifted the injured shoulder so that it came out of the shadow

into the pale starlight.

"Sho, now!" exclaimed Mr. Borral. "Well, if you ain't ben a-hurting yourself!" He leaned forward, stretching out a hesitant finger, and touched the spiral coils of the bandage where they showed above the sling.

"It's shorely neat!" he said. "Does it hurt you?"
"Not now," said the girl. "It's almost well again."
She reached across with her uninjured hand to shift
the loop of the sling, and Mr. Borral, with playful
intent, tried to capture the hand. The girl jerked
away from him angrily, and Mr. Borral retired to his
place and brayed with appreciation. Nevertheless,
Tommy Carteret thought that his face, in the pale
light, looked somewhat surprised, as at a rebuff he had
not expected.

Tommy rose to his feet.

"I must be getting back to my hill," he said. The girl started forward quickly with a little murmur of protest, but sank back again in her place, and Tommy, after a civil word or two of satisfaction over her rapid convalescence, said good night to the two and went

away.

As he climbed Half-Breed Hill and, arriving at the cabin, set himself to making lights there, he was vaguely conscious of a feeling of irritation, an abrupt reversal of mood, which, still vaguely, he traced to the gentleman with the purple-embroidered braces. He said to himself that he had, before Mr. Borral's arrival, been interested and absorbed, not as usual by his own trials, but by the troubles of another being. He had been taken, for a little time, quite out of himself. Emotions long buried—emotions of sympathy and pity—had been stirred in him, and a strong desire awakened to better the girl's lot in life, as he could so easily do. He filled and lighted a pipe and sat down before the littered writingtable where the red lamp hung. His mind ran back over the evening, and certain eyes, sombre, tragic, joyless unspeakably, gloomed from the shadows at the far end of the room.

"He cometh not," she said.
She said: "I am aweary, aweary—
I would that I were dead."

That a girl should have such eyes—an ignorant, unenlightened girl of the hills! Young Tommy twisted uneasily in his chair and scowled at the shadows in the far corner. They meant nothing, those glooming eyes. They were eyes, not windows to a tragic soul eyes set in a most commonplace head by way of a grim joke, by way of showing a man how much his judgment was worth—the worth of a handful of grass. Still, to have got her out of this squalid hole, sent her to her silly little town where she might be like other girls! What had she meant by all at once refusing to go? Tommy ventured a dozen possible reasons, most of them untenable as arguments—one of them, flattering to himself (and, by the way, true). At this he gave a

bitter laugh of amusement and self-scorn.

"Good God, am I turning vain?" he demanded. "My head must be going at last. Nonsense! Who's to make a girl out? Who's to fathom a girl's mind? Not I, for one! Egad, but she was handsome, with the sun in her eyes, and her cheeks flushed. There's at least a fine animal! What's inside to make it human? Aye, there's the rub! What's inside? How's one to know? That young farmer chap, now! I expect he is— What do they call it?—courting her. I expect he's as good as any of them, hereabouts, but what an apology for a human being! What a mate for that splendid gipsy girl! Eh, she has eyes! Were I alive, instead of dead, and an automaton walking in my place, I expect they'd haunt me. Eh, she has eyes, indeed! I wish Carnardon might see them. They'd give him a text for more sermons, I'll warrant. They'd give him still more argument for—" He halted suddenly, pipe in air, his eyes wide with a new thought, and he sat quite still and well-nigh breathless till the fire died out of the pipe he held.

""Marry—one of these girls I see—driving past to and from the—village," he quoted presently, low, under his breath, in broken words. "Better, a thousand times, drop to their level and live a man's

life than—sit outside in your solitary hell."

Eh, she had eyes, that splendid gipsy girl, and lips

that were red, and blood that leaped red under her cheeks! "Why not?" said Tommy Carteret in a whisper, staring over his dead pipe into the shadows. Better a thousand times than this solitary hell. Old Henry Carnardon had said that, and if Henry Carnardon did not know, who, in God's world, did?

"Why not?" whispered young Carteret, and, though he was dead and an automaton walked abroad in his place, something stirred within the automaton's works. Something like a heart sent its blood a beat faster through the veins. She had eyes, that gipsy girl!

But his moods, it would seem, never could last more than a few minutes at a stretch. In ten he was laughing once more—his bitter, sneering laugh of amusement

and self-disgust. Marry! he marry!

"You're mad!" he said as he had said before to Lord Henry Carnardon. "You don't know what you're saying. Marry, indeed! And to a red-cheeked, black-haired girl—a hill man's proper mate, a wench with calling eyes, a wench common as earth, vulgar as the commonest—witness her blackguarding of her father on the night of her injury!—a common wench smeared thinly over with a wash of civilising! How quickly she would shed that on occasion! Marry, indeed!" Young Tommy threw back his head, laughing, and his eyes fell upon the Temple gate and that which sat within. The laugh stopped short.

"Marry!" said Tommy Carteret in a shaking whisper.

"Marry? Not while God's in His heaven."

### CHAPTER XI

# A LITTLE CLOUD COMES OVER THE HILLS

HERE, at this point, I am sorely beset by temptation, here where young Tommy's story finds itself, for a little space, dropping to an easy, uneventful jog-trot, or, to put it more aptly, a lull—the lull before the coming of the whirlwind which was born of that wind Tommy had so innocently sown. Here, I should like to sit back in my chair and tell stories. They would not be without interest, I think. They would cluster round the central story, though they would not advance it. I should like to tell how Tommy spent his time in these slack weeks; how he rode and drove through the hill country, meeting the strange hill people, through the hills and away to the Dutch Creek land where the Germans-for, of course, they are not Dutch at alltend their neat, tidy farms, women and men alike working in the fields. I should like to tell about the wonderful dance he attended, one night, escorted by the faithful Jared, a hill dance to which the hill people came from miles away in carts and wagons; of how a young man with a violin sat on a table and scraped old, old tunes the while he "called off" in a beautiful tenor voice for the heavy-footed dancers to blunder through their figures (no round dances, mind you; they are immoral; so are low-cut frocks, but so are not certain stone jugs which arrive with each wagon and are hidden behind a convenient shrub; so also are not

certain transactions which occur between dances in the darkness without). I should like to tell about the dinners and long evenings at the hermitage, on the village road, when Henry Carnardon, breaking through his shell of long silence, told tales and marvels out of a half-forgotten past, and drew warnings from the same.

But, if temptation besets me here, and I look with longing eyes at the fat note-book out of which I might spin such length of yarn, still, at my other elbow, sits conscience, inexorable, prodding me on to the stronger, grimmer deeds which wait at the end of Tommy's little

breathing-space.

It was, I think, about three weeks after the night upon which Tommy attempted to enact the rôle of fairy godmother, that Jared, who was by way of being a sort of local gossip, betrayed signs, one morning, while clearing away the breakfast things, of bearing a weight upon his mind. He protracted his simple labour far beyond its needs, he often shook a gloomy and careworn head, and he obviously manufactured conversation. Tommy was in a rather bad humour—he had had a white night—and at last turned upon the man with some impatience.

"What is it?" he demanded. "You want to say something. Why don't you say it?" Jared dropped

a dish.

"Well, you see, Mr. Carter," he said, "it's this-a-way —them little carpets wants beatin' agen, don't they?"

"Get on with it!" said Tommy irritably. "Never

mind the rugs."

"Well, you see," said Jared, shuffling—"I'll take 'em out this mawnin' an' whop 'em—you see, it's that there ornery young Borral, him as was sparkin' Mariana Canfield."

"Aah!" said young Tommy, turning about. "What of him?"

"Well, you see," said the anxious Jared, "he—he's ben a-gettin' some extry-ordinary yarn from ole Dave about you an' the gal, an' he's right madded about it."

"Some extraordinary tale?" said young Tommy.

"What the devil do you mean?"

"Well, ole Dave," said the other, "has took agin you, I dunno why. He's ben a-talkin' agin' you from the firs' to everybody which'd listen"—Tommy nodded—"an' he's told Joe Borral some tale about the gal—well, the gal gettin' her arm broke over hyuh along with you-all. He says 'at you brung her home most daid. He was for a-turnin' her out o' the house, but she sassed him back, an' her mother stood along with her an' said 'at if the gal went she'd go too. Ole Dave is plumb afeared of the gal—on'y thing he's afeared of, I reckon."

Tommy sat quiet in his chair by the door. Anger was hot at his heart, but he made no sign, for he knew how futile the anger was. He had learned a bit about these hill people during the past few weeks.

"Go on!" he said briefly. "What about this

Borral?"

Jared dropped another plate and wiped his fevered brow.

"He's a-rampin' an' a-rampagin' aroun'," said he, "carryin' a shot-gun an' allowin' 'at he'll shoot you."

Tommy Carteret gave a short laugh.

"Why doesn't he come here and do it?" he inquired.

"I'm usually at home."

"He's too ornery," explained the troubled Jared. "He's afeared. He's one o' them 'at always talks loud—like some varieties o' dawgs."

"I fancy I'm safe enough," said Tommy. But Jared's brow was still anxious and he shook his head.

"Now, don't you be too sure, Mr. Carter," he urged. "I know them kind of people. They're cowards, but sometimes they get a right good load o' licker into 'em an' they're likely to make trouble. If I was you-all, I'd carry that there little revolover o' yourn whilst I was goin' aroun'. It ain't a-goin' to do no harm, an' it might come handy. Yes, it might. Joe Borral's powerful wroughted up."

Tommy's angry face relaxed, and he gave the faithful Jared a clap on the shoulder as he passed by him into

the other room.

"Don't you worry," he said cheerfully. "I shall die, one day, I expect, but it won't be from Joe Borral's shot-gun. I know a bit about that sort of man myself. You're a good chap, though, Jared, and I'm glad you spoke up. Let me know of anything more you hear. And, now, I'd like to have the mare saddled. I'm going to the village."

"You'll take the little revolover?" demanded Jared, but Tommy only smiled, and the man went out, shaking a gloomy head and muttering anxiously to himself.

Tommy rode to town through the blazing sun, and gloom rode with him, darkening the pitiless glare. What was one to do in the face of this black hatred, this intolerant hostility? He had learned, as has been said, something of the narrow, tortuous minds of these hill people, but to-day he felt once more, as he had felt that first night at Canfield's, a sense of utter impotence, a helpless, baffled rage which knew itself helpless. What was one to do in a land where a father will deliberately blacken his daughter to that daughter's suitor for hatred against another man?

The mare had little ease this morning; she was not even allowed to pause at the hermitage. Once they passed a neighbour, a man who lived not far from Half-Breed Hill, driving homeward from the village in a clattering, springless wagon. Tommy Carteret called out a cheerful "Howdy," but the man looked upon him darkly and returned but a surly nod. Tommy cursed under his breath.

"Borral's work!" he said. "That chap borrowed a churn of me only three days ago."

At Winston's, the customary jury of village fathers sat in the shade, chairs tilted back. Some of them spoke to young Tommy in their usual tone of geniality. Others only stared, and Tommy made a mental note of which they were. Inside, Winston was, as ever, effusive in welcome. He warmly shook the newcomer's hand, inquiring after his health, but, in the act, he winked significantly and jerked his head toward the rear of the store, where a group of men stood talking, one of them loudly.

"Look out for that there Joe Borral," said the friendly Winston in a low tone. "He's shorely on the war-path."

Tommy moved toward the back of the room, looking into a show-case for something he wanted. He glanced once toward the group of standing men, and nodded to such of them as he recognised. He noted that their voices had dropped as he approached, and that their manner seemed awkward and embarrassed. They looked toward one of their number—it was Joe Borral—as if to see what he was going to do, but it appeared that he had formed no immediate plans. Tommy found in the show-case what he had been looking for—a razor-strap, paid for it, and stood, for a moment,

chatting with Winston. The voices of the group behind him were again raised as he moved a bit away, and among them Joe Borral's was conspicuous. Tommy caught a reference to "City dood's" clothes which, the speaker opined, had been constructed by a dressmaker. The remark was obviously intended for insult and as obviously intended to be overheard. The other men in the party broke into laughter, awkward and shamed, or sneering and derisive, and a little gust of anger flared up in Tommy Carteret.

He swung about and took a step toward the back of the room, and his face, as always when he was angry, went white and red and white again. Unconcernedly to stand before it required more courage than any man there possessed, and there was a quick, uneasy stir

among the group.

"I believe you were discussing me," said young Tommy sharply to the man Borral. "Am I right?" His tone had an odd cold abruptness, and well matched his cold gaze. There was no answer, but another little

uneasy stir.

"You meant to be insulting, I expect," he went on. "I should like you to know, and I should like these other gentlemen to hear, that nothing you can say, here or elsewhere, will insult me, because it is not of enough consequence and because you are not the sort of person whose words bear any weight. As to your silly jibes about my clothes, I can't expect you to realise that you are merely rude, not at all funny. My clothes are my own, and I shall wear such as please me. You have the same liberty. I shall not criticise yours." He moved a step nearer, looking hard into Borral's eyes, and the group instinctively drew back as he approached. They were not all cowardly men, but this method was

as new to them as the words young Carteret spoke, and, moreover, he looked dangerous. People always longed to get away from young Tommy when he was angry.

He looked far more dangerous than he was.

"I've been hearing," he said, "some talk about your looking for me with a shot-gun and boasting that you would do me up. I understand that some one has been telling you lies about my conduct, and that you have constituted yourself a sort of combined judge, jury, and hangman. I dislike people who threaten and then fail to carry out their threats. Have you your shot-gun here? This is a convenient hour and place. Why not have it over with?" He saw the quick, instinctive glance which several of the men turned toward a shot-gun that leaned against the wall near by.

"Is that your gun?" he demanded.

The other man shuffled his feet and muttered under his breath. He was a poor thing, as boasters commonly are—a pitifully poor thing.

"What's it to you?" he growled, shifting his furtive

eyes.

"It's my funeral," said young Tommy patiently. "At least, it was to have been, I understand." He looked from the shifty-eyed creature before him to the gun, and back again, waiting.

"Aren't you going to shoot me?" he asked. Borral cursed under his breath, and his face was crimson. Young Tommy looked upon him for a moment, con-

temptuously.

"What a damned coward you are!" he said at last, and, turning his back, went out of the store and down to the street.

It had been a foolish action, the whole of it, and he admitted it to a chiding inward voice as he rode away in the sunlight, but he had been angry and the

temptation strong.

"I expect I've made a very bitter enemy," he said, sighing. "I expect that chap will never forgive me for facing him down before the others; but it was fun. Shot-gun! Rot! That coward would get behind a tree to shoot a rabbit! I'll stop in and tell Carnardon. Carnardon'll laugh."

But Carnardon did not laugh when the two sat together over their whiskey and water in the cool dim

library. He shook his head and looked grave.

"I'm afraid you've made a mistake," he said. "It would have been better to let the fellow go on boasting and bragging unchecked. He'd have taken it out in boasting then, because it is evident that he is a coward. Now, you have shamed him publicly. He must take some measures or lose all standing among his friends. He will probably try to shoot you from behind a tree, one day."

"I think not," said young Tommy. "Even that requires some courage—the consequences do, anyhow. And he has none. Of course, he'll lie about me and blackguard me and harm me in every possible way that is safe for himself, and, on that account, I shouldn't have attacked him, but I don't think he'll try to kill me. You haven't seen him. I have." But still Henry

Carnardon shook his head.

"He'll do it," said he. "One day, he'll do it. One day he will fill himself up with this raw, poisonous whiskey they drink hereabouts, and he'll do it. I wish you had let him alone."

Tommy stirred his glass with a meditative hand, and he smiled down into it for a little time in silence. His face had changed. "If I really thought that possible," he said gently, "I should thank God for having provoked the man to it, and I should pray that it might come soon. But I have no such hope. The chap is a harmless coward. No, I shall live on in perfect safety. My prophetic eye sees a vista of years—a road with white milestones, each stone for a year, and I cannot see the end of the road." He laughed quietly to himself at his little conceit, turning and stirring the long glass between his hands, and staring down into it as if it were there that he saw his long perspective of road with the white milestones.

Henry Carnardon sat up in his chair with a sigh.

"I do not like to repeat advice," he said, "and rejected advice, above all, but I should be glad to see you marry this girl. She would seem to be a handsome creature, and a shade above her surroundings, from what you have said. If you look forward to a lifetime of exile here, why not make it, after a fashion, a comfortable exile? It goes without saying that the girl is not of your class, but that matters little. In the course of a few lonely years you will come to see that class is but a hollow thing. One adjusts one's self to one's environments. Such a marriage in the world outside would be a calamity; here it is only natural. What shall it profit you that you are superior in birth and breeding and education to these hill people? They vaguely feel it and resent it, but they do not envy you. They think of you merely as something unpleasantly strange. It is as if a single inhabitant of some more advanced planet should be dropped into London or into New York. Men would deem him, not superior, but strange. It would seem to us no extraordinary thing for him to marry one of our daughters. It would put him in the light of sensibly attempting to make himself one of us. No, my friend, superiority to one's surroundings is not a good thing; it is a bad one. It profits nobody, does no manner of good. It makes for only solitude and pain." He laughed a little, pouring himself more whiskey from the near-by decanter.

"This takes on the character of a lecture," he observed. "I shall write it down. I had no idea that I could be so eloquent and, at the same time, so sensible."

Tommy Carteret frowned, half irritably.

"You are bent upon arguing me into matrimony," he said. "And I am as bent upon keeping out of complications. Time, as you suggest, may one day drive me to it, but for the present I cannot face the thing. I grant you," he said after a pause, "that, in the abstract, you are right enough. A man wasn't meant to live alone. There are times when—there are moods when the thing attracts one. After all, one is a man, and the nature in one makes its call. She is a handsome girl. One has one's temptations, but, I tell you, it must not be. I am a wreck cast up on the sands. Let me die and go to pieces alone, as a wreck should! Why should I drag another—others still, into my ruin? What right have I?" He rose from his chair shaking a stubborn head.

"Don't talk to me of marriage!" said he. "It is wholly out of the question. Meanwhile I must be going home. On the way I shall pray that that cowardly fool Borral be inspired to put an end to my troubles with his shot-gun. Though I know quite well he won't."

### CHAPTER XII

IN THE GULLY WHERE THE BLACKBERRIES GREW

Toward the end of this week two letters arrived from New York, one in the hand of old Thomas Carteret, the other in the angular, uncompromising penmanship of Arabella Crowley. They had not come quite in the same post, but they reached young Tommy together, for one had lain waiting two or three days at Win-Tommy opened his father's first, but, like its predecessor, he skimmed it for news of import and left much unread. It was a sort of shrinking delicacy in He recoiled from the sight of poor old Tommy's cowardice lying open in its nakedness. His face flushed as he tore the paper across. Old Tommy prattled again of illness; he grew cheaply hysterical, spoke in vague terms of righting the matter in a vague future, of a woman's honour which must be shielded—Honour, so please you! He might well have had his first miserable screed stereotyped and copies sent to Egypt from time to time. Young Tommy's face flushed, but it was not all in vicarious shame and shamed contempt. There was a strain of pity in it for the unconscious wail that had run through the old man's words; such a helpless wail of strength far overtaxed, of manifest duty manifestly too great for feeble powers.

"Poor old governor!" said young Tommy as he slit

the envelope of Arabella Crowley's letter.

Arabella was quite herself, half tender, half fierce,

scolding the while she stroked.

"You don't deserve another word from me so long as you live," she said. "You've called me in plain language a meddling old busybody, and I've a good mind to throw you over upon your own devices; I leave you to judge the value of those."

She stormed on in this fashion for several pages and young Tommy laughed, but toward the end came a

paragraph which he read twice.

"A bit of news," said Arabella, "which I give you, sans phrase. My doctor-man is Abeles, who is by way of being a heart specialist, but keeps up a bit of general practice, as in my case, among his old friends. In a roundabout way he gave me to understand, last week, that the Hartwell man, whom you call your jailer, has been to him for advice as to his heart. This is all I know of the matter, and I will not comment upon it, for you know as much about heart-disease as I do. People affected by it may live out their spans or they may die to-morrow. Perhaps I should not have told you, but I have a fancy that you would like to know of any littlest, remotest sign of hope. While I am speaking of Hartwell, however, I may tell you that the little woman-Mrs. Hartwell, of course—has been to see me several times and has poured out her woes to me till I am wellnigh drowned of them. She is, of course, utterly wretched. She lives in her husband's house, but they never meet save in public, where they go about together as before. I have done my best to make the poor woman tell her husband the truth, but without success. She is weak as water, Tommy, but there is one rather strong thing in her, and that is her love for your father. She will not betray him. I wonder how much he ever

cared for her. No more than for the others, I expect. Still, despite this firmness, I have hopes of her. She never sees your father, and her position at home is almost intolerable. She may, in time, break down. At any rate, I think her our best hope. God knows, Tommy, that I shrink from the thought of the man I once cared a great deal for brought to book for his sins, but he has sowed, and the sowers should reap. I shrink from that far less than I rebel at the thought of your unjust exile. Hope on, Tommy! I'm hoping always."

Tommy frowned with displeasure.

"That woman mustn't give the thing away!" he said. "Aunt Arabella mustn't let her if she tries. Confound Aunt Arabella, anyhow, for a meddling, interfering old Is there no stopping her?" Then he turned back once more to the paragraph about Hartwell and re-read it. He found himself at the end with his own heart thumping and a mad wild hope whirling in his brain; but the thing endured for no more than a moment, and depression came hard upon its heels, for the belief that this exile was to be endless had become oddly, incredibly strong in him. He would have rejected a much more tenable hope than old Arabella had been able to

"Those heart-people live forever," he said gloomily. "I've known them to die at ninety. He'd last, anyhow. If it were galloping consumption, he'd last. Hatred would keep him alive." Tommy crumpled the letter between his hands and threw it from him, and he sat for some minutes staring at it where it lay on the floor, and thinking of old Arabella and of his jailer, Hartwell, and of the poor little woman whom Hartwell called wife. Oddly enough, there had been in Arabella's letter no mention at all of Sibyl-I wonder why. Arabella must have had her occult reasons—and Tommy told himself in one swift thought, not daring to dwell upon it, that he was glad. Had there been news of her he would have seized upon it, read it, re-read it, twisted the words into a thousand meanings—crowded a thousand other meanings in between the lines, and, probably, ended it all by a fit of blackest, bitterest gloom. Now, however, he picked up the crumpled sheets from the floor where he had thrown them, and dropped them with the torn shreds of old Tommy's wail into the Chinese basket by the writing-table. Then he took up his broad Panama

hat and went out into the morning sun.

He had no destination in mind, but strolled aimlessly inward, along the eastern slope of his hill, toward the main ridge from which it jutted. Here, near the junction of the two, ran, still inward, a little, narrow, tortuous, steep-banked gully, an ancient water-course, no doubt, but now overgrown with young mulberry trees and scrub-oaks and elders. Down in its bed blackberries throve in plenty. Tommy made his way down the deep, steep slope, clinging to shrubs and branches. At the bottom he found a tiny bank of grass beside a trickle of water. A spreading mulberry made a spot of shade, and it was cool and green and breathed comfort. He sat down on the bit of turf, wetting his hands in the cold spring-water, and drawing them across his head and face. It was very still here; only a solitary cricket away somewhere in the brush kept up a busy, unceasing monologue, and a forlorn little turkey-chick, strayed from the fold, and witless after its kind, stood in a space of quivering sun, wings drooping, head on high, and peeped mournfully. From time to time a bumblebee droned past about his business, and once a small, hot and dusty black snake came to the spring to drink, but caught sight of the intruder and made impolite faces at him.

"I should very much like," said young Tommy Carteret, stifling a yawn, "a hatful of those blackberries yonder. They look good. They smell good, too. By Jove, the air's full of them! But I'm hanged if I'll get up. I'm too comfy."

He did get up, though, rather hastily, for the blackberry bushes, a little way down the gully, crackled and stirred, and a moving gleam of white showed among

them.

"Good morning!" said young Tommy. The gleam of white came into the open sunlight, and it was Mariana Canfield, with a basket on her arm and her hands stained red from the berries. She said "Oh!" in a low, startled tone when she saw the man standing there, and then, after a moment, came slowly toward him.

She wore a white frock of some very thin material. It was not too clean—it had stains of earth and of green leaves and red fruit upon it, and it had the air of being long since outgrown. It was short, coming no more than to the girl's ankles, and the sleeves, which she had rolled up to the elbows, were too tight. But in it, small and ill-made as it was, her strong young figure stood straight and full—too full for her years—giving form and grace to the formless garment. She had been wearing also a sunbonnet of bright scarlet, but this had fallen back from her head, and hung at her shoulders, throwing her black hair, damp and curled with the heat, about her temples, into strong relief. It may have been that hot still place, with its over-sweet odour of crushed berries, or it may have been the contrast between the thin white rag of a garment and the dark splendid beauty of the girl-arms and throat bare, cheeks glowing, breast

heaving in its too tight confines. Certainly the odd spell of overabundant vitality which hung ever about her had never before been so powerful, had never called so loud. Tommy Carteret, who, in his bitter gloom, was as far as a man may be from the appeal of things fleshly, felt it and scowled at himself for the feeling.

"How did you find your way here?" asked the girl. "Oh, I happened in!" said he. "I'd never been down here, so I came to see what it was like. Good fortune comes to one quite unexpectedly at times." The girl looked at him for a moment with puzzled eyes. She was almost without a sense of humour, as women of her passionate, gipsy type are apt to be, and she never felt quite sure whether Tommy's polite banter was seriously meant or was by way of poking fun at her.

"I've been picking blackberries," she volunteered,

setting down the half-filled basket.

"Ah, now!" said young Tommy, "I had suspected that. I'm very quick at guessing things." He laughed gently, and the girl once more turned her puzzled eyes

upon him, suspecting ridicule.

"We might sit down for a bit, and rest," he suggested.
"I'll help you fill your basket presently." He made room for her on the turf in the spot of cool shade, and she sat down, dipping her berry-stained hands in the water as Tommy had done earlier.

"I've got all I need," she said. "I was just ready to go home. It wouldn't do, anyhow, I reckon, for you to

pick. You'd get stains all over your clothes."

Tommy gave a little exasperated laugh.

"Shall I never live down my clothes?" he cried. "They seem to annoy everybody. Really, they're very ordinary clothes, but the community here can't seem to become used to them. A gentleman in the village made

remarks about them, in my hearing, the other day. Rude, I call it. What?"

But the girl turned to him swiftly, and her eyes were troubled.

"Joe Borral!" she said. "Oh, I know, I know! I heard about it from your Jared's folks, yesterday. I wish—I wish you hadn't madded him. He might—do something to you."

Tommy allowed himself a skeptical laugh.

"I don't like to say unpleasant things about any friend of yours," he said. "Indeed, I'm sorry the subject has come up. I didn't think you knew about the matter. But as to Mr. Borral doing anything to me, I have grave doubts. He is not a young man who would do things. He is best at talking."

The girl's cheeks flushed, and she gave a little quick

laugh.

"I wish I might have been there," she said. "It must have been fine to see you scaring the life out of Joe Borral. Jared's brother told me all about it. He said he wouldn't want to have any quarrel with you if you was right mad at him." Then, all at once, her eyes clouded again, and she turned to young Tommy anxiously.

"You don't know what you've been and done," she said. "Of course, you couldn't do anything else-I know that—but you've got Joe Borral crazy-mad against you and—and—there's others that would help him if he —if he wanted to do anything. Maybe you don't know what he—thinks, what people have been telling him

about you and-about you-"

"Yes," said Tommy Carteret quietly, "I know. If the man who told him, who put him up to all this nonsense, had been any other man than-he was, I should have half killed him some days ago. As it is, I'm

helpless."

"Oh, yes!" said the girl bitterly. "It was my father. I'm—glad you know. He's told Joe a pack of the worst kind of lies. It's a nice sort of father to have, aint it? I tried to make Joe understand that there wasn't any truth in it. I told him just how the whole thing happened, and that you'd saved my life. I told him you—you didn't ever—even look at me except for politeness. Why should you? Of course, he wouldn't believe me. He'd rather believe my father—the dog!—and so would all these other men, and women."

"But why?" cried Tommy Carteret. "Why do they want to believe such blackguardly things about me? What have I ever done to them? Have I injured them in coming here? Have I hurt anybody? Have I acted in any way as I shouldn't? See! I came here quietly and bought a bit of land from a man who was anxious to sell it. I paid him its full value and more. I interfered with nobody; I asked favours of nobody. When favours were asked of me, I granted them gladly. Why are these people so bitter against me?" The girl shook her head with a little helpless gesture.

"I don't know," she said. "Or at least I couldn't make you understand. It's because you're different, I reckon. They don't like you because you're not like them. They just naturally suspicion every one they don't understand. And about—about what they're saying now, they believe what my father has told them, because, if they'd ben in your place, they'd have acted like he says you acted. You don't know them, but I

do."

Tommy turned his head away, frowning dully out across the little gully, but the girl dragged herself

nearer to him, half sitting, half kneeling on the turf, and caught at his arm with her two hands.

"Please," she begged, "couldn't you go away somewheres for a little while—just a little while, until this thing is over with? I'm—afraid for you. I tell you, you don't know these people here. They'll do something horrible if that ornery pup gets them madded to it. I've heard more about it than you have, I know. Couldn't you go away for a while?"

Tommy turned his eyes back to her face. He was still frowning, and his jaw was squared a bit, for the girl in urging him to run from physical danger had not been tactful. Tommy was one to court such, not to flee from it. But his frown relaxed when he saw her face, for it was genuinely frightened and full of anxiety. Her eyes

were wide and clouded, and her cheeks a bit paler than their wont. Her breast strained at the white, tight, flimsy cloth that bound it.

"Please!" she begged. "Please!"

Tommy shook a stubborn head.

"I stop here," said he. "Really, I think you're exaggerating the danger. You're giving your friend Borral credit for more courage and executive ability than he possesses, but, in any case, I stop here. I'm not in the habit of running away from things." The

girl's hands shook his arm desperately.

"I tell you," she cried again, "you don't know. You don't realise. You're thinking that these people are like your own kind of people. They ain't. They aren't nothing like them. Can't nothing I say make you go? Isn't there nothing 'at would make you see?" It was strange to hear her fairly correct English drop from her in a moment of excitement, and the strong vernacular return.

She crept closer still, until she was leaning against him, as she gripped his arm, until her breast lifted and fell against his shoulder. Her voice dropped to a sort of wheedling, coaxing tenderness.

"Ef you won't go for yo' own sake," she said, "go for mine. You might—think a little about me. You know

what they're a-saying. Please, please, go!"

Tommy drew a long breath, and his hands, at his two sides, gripped and tore the soft turf. The girl's hold upon his arm, the nearness of her splendid dark face to his, the lift and swell of her breathing against his shoulder, stirred his blood, and stirred him, too, to a sort of anger that he could be affected in this way—set him to resisting it stubbornly. He had need of clear thought, untempered by emotion—clear reason unwarmed by feeling, for this girl's case was indeed bad, and something must be done about it. It was the girl who suffered from the slander, not the man. Somehow, these scandalmongers must be checked.

"I'm sorry," he said; "I'm more sorry than I can say. You're quite right. I must consider you. The bad part of it is that I cannot go away. There are reasons—I may not go into them—which must keep me here always. I'm sorry. The trouble has sprung from such innocent little sources that I can scarcely realise how far it has gone. The only thing I can do is to keep away from you——" He felt the girl start suddenly against his shoulder. "If I keep strictly on my side of the Little Bottom, if it is known that I never see you or speak to you, these fools may realise they were too quick with their suspicions. I will promise to do that, if you like. It is the only thing I can think of."

Then the girl drew a little away from him and

dropped her face into her hands, kneeling upon the turf, and began to sob very bitterly. And then, at last, I think, young Tommy knew. He had been long blind. Significant things had come before his eyes, but found them fixed upon distance. Significant words and tones and sighs had come to his ears, but found them dull and unheeding. Now, at last, I think he knew, for he looked upon the girl, bowed over her shamed sobbing, and his cheeks paled a bit, and he said in a still whisper:

"Good God!" And he said it again and again. The stir her near presence had roused in him, the quickened blood her breast's touch had evoked, died away suddenly, leaving a chill which sent a shiver over him from head to foot.

There be men among us yet, I thank God, in whose clean hearts walk chivalry and honour, not apart, like strangers, each with separate scope, but hand in hand, as twins. To such, duty is a simple thing, admitting of no argument. A woman in distress is to be succoured, not counting the cost.

To young Tommy, at this moment, the matter presented itself so—plain, simple, undeniable. Here wept a woman against whom, innocent, scandal had cried out, leaving her in shame and grief. Through himself, innocent also, the shame had come. Without him, she had been happy to-day. There seemed but one answer to that. And yet he could not make it. The chill settled about his heart, paralysing him, robbing him of the power of speech or movement. Voices shrilled within him, voices of self-preservation, pleading, extenuating, offering excuses, crying out against this thing which honour demanded. Every argument, keen, cogent, and considered, which his brain at

leisure might have arrayed against such a marriage, crowded miraculously to the front. He did not love the girl—that went without saying. Such momentary stirs of feeling as he might have had in her presence were not love nor anything like it, but a very different thing. They were unsuited the one to the other. An ocean of differences of temperament, of breeding, of modes of thought, surged between them.—He could not do it.

Henry Carnardon's words came into his mind. It may be that he called them up in a sort of desperation to weigh against so much upon the other side. Henry Carnardon had urged marriage upon him. "You will at least be living a man's life." Who should be wise if not that grief-riddled man? If he could not speak from knowledge of matrimony, at least he knew the hell of solitude to its bitterest deeps. She was a hand-some girl, too. Few handsomer. She had eyes!

Young Tommy strove for speech, but everything within him shrank and recoiled. He could not do it. His tongue would not make the words.

And so, for a long time, the two sat or knelt there, on the turf, near to each other, Tommy Carteret silent because speech was withheld from him, the girl weeping, face hidden. Then, presently, when her sobs had ceased, she lifted her head,—her face was paler than its wont, Tommy noted—and, with her eyes averted, reached for the half-filled basket of blackberries.

"I must be—going home," she said. "I'm—sorry. I was a fool to cry. I'm scared, a little, about those men. It's made me nervous." She rose to her feet and pulled the crimson sunbonnet up over her hair. Before she turned away, she made as if she would

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speak again, but no words came. Then she went slowly down the tortuous bed of the gully, and the bushes hid her.

Tommy let her go without a word.

### CHAPTER XIII

## NIGHT ON HALF-BREED HILL

On the evening of this same day the admirable Jared once more betrayed signs of an unquiet spirit and a mind ill at ease. He bore the air of one who would reopen a disagreeable subject but sadly lacked the necessary courage. But at last, as he took away the coffee things and opportunity narrowed toward its end, he found speech.

"I reckon," said he, affecting nonchalance, "'at you-all finds yo'self right lonely, a passin' yo' nights

all alone hyuh."

"Fairly so," said Tommy, lighting a cigarette. His tone did not encourage discussion, but the admirable

Jared, once embarked, would not put back.

"I was a-studyin' about it," he said, "an' it appeared to me 'at you-all might feel mo' comfortable like ef I was to sleep hyuh, en case you was to need me. I could make up a baid in that there little room over the hawse. Maybe you'd like fo' me to do that."

"Certainly not," said Tommy, a bit coldly. "Why should I need you? Do I look as if I were afraid of the dark?" The admirable Jared grinned a sheepish

grin, but he still seemed worried.

"Maybe you might need me," he insisted. Tommy looked up from his cigarette with a frown.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"It's them Borral an' Canfield crowd," said Jared,

coming to his subject. "I heered something this mawnin' 'at I didn't like. They's ten or a dozen of 'em, an' they's shorely peevish agin you. They might mek' trouble."

"They might make words," said young Tommy, contemptuously, "but they'll never make anything else. Don't you worry. I'm safe enough. We'll go on just as before." He spoke again, as Jared was quitting the room, and his tone was kinder—a bit apologetic.

"I don't want you to think I'm not—grateful and—and all that sort of thing," he said. "Thanks very much, you know, for wanting to stand by, but I think it won't be necessary. People who bluster and threaten

never do anything."

But after Jared had washed up the dishes and gone away with a gloomy shake of the head, young Tommy moved restlessly about the cabin in a mood of annoyed irritation. Why should every one suddenly insist that he was in personal danger? The probability that the man Borral would ever make good his silly threats seemed to him so faint and remote that he laughed at it with instant scorn. Further, such miserable cowards never had influence enough in any community to enlist other men in their personal quarrels. Of course, there was Canfield, but he rather fancied that Canfield was something of a coward too. Certainly these were no men to trouble one's sleep.

He dragged the long steamer chair out into the open, facing westward, where that nightly battle was being fought above the far hills-crimson, sanguinary, and where in the huge cup of the Great Bottom the paleblue mists were writhing. He brought out a pipe and a book—the favourite Villon—and he sat himself down there in the last rays of the sunset, staring, and puffing great clouds of smoke—miniature imitations of the mist-wreaths below—and stirring with an idle hand the leaves of the book on his knee. Villon went unread that evening; young Tommy's thoughts had nearer food. His face went hard and square and stern—softened suddenly—went hard again, and the pipe hung neglected from his teeth.

"I can't do it!" said Tommy to the golden west.

And an hour later, when the dusk crept round him, he said it again, fiercely, as to some one who stood accusing.

"I can't do it! I tell you, I can't do it!"

He was fagged and weary, body and soul, when at last, in the dark, he rose to go indoors. He stood by his doorstep a moment, taking long breaths of the cool, night air. A little breeze bore across the hill-top from the eastward. It was sweet with summer smells, aromatic, life-giving.

"They must have been cutting pine on the Dutch Creek road," said Tommy absently. "No, that's stronger than pine. It's like burning pitch, or tar, or

something. Anyhow, it's good."

Inside the cabin, he lighted the red lamp and dropped down into his arm-chair before the writing-table.

The silent, nightly tragedy of that watch under the red lamp! The deadly, unvarying pitifulness of it! Night after night, week after week, month after month. Always the same—still, solitary, hopeless. I see him come in with lagging steps from his hour of sunset and sweet dusk. I see him strike a match that sputters for a moment and then bursts into tiny flame. I see him light the swinging lamp and pull down over it its red shade. I see him drop into his chair, casting a

listless eye over the litter of papers and books and pipes on the square table. I see him, perhaps, pull down a book from the orderly rows on the bookshelves near at hand, and read in it, turning here and there in hope of interest. But presently I see the book drop to the floor, and Tommy's figure settle a bit in the armchair—weariness in every drooping line, lassitude beyond the power of words to picture. The chin sinks a bit on his breast, the lines in that strong, square face of his deepen, harden, the mouth draws tight, and he is quite still, staring ahead into something far beyond the near wall that he faces-into something we may not see or picture, we who have not lived through those bitter, dreary months. It is thus I see him, and shiver a bit-grim, drooping in his chair, staring and nodding through untold hours. And utter, despairing gloom sits with him, an arm about his neck.

On this night, of all nights, I know that gloom sat with him, and an exceedingly great weariness hung upon all his drooping body, for that struggle out in the dusk had tired more than words can tell. Not even Villon could tempt him to reading; not even the little faithful journal could make him take up his pen. It seemed to him, glooming there in his loneliness, that, across the path which had been given him to walk, a mountain rose, sheer and high and precipitous, barring the way—a mountain which, perhaps, a better man might climb, or a worse circumvent. For himself he saw no passage.

What was it Henry Carnardon had said?

"I have sat at this table for hours . . . with a pistol before my hands, stating the question and arguing each side of it with all the skill I possess, hoping against hope that one day I might be able to argue

down my scruple and end it all . . ." Tommy pulled open a drawer of the writing-table, and from it took the loaded pistol which he kept there—the "revolover" which Jared had begged him to carry. He laid the weapon upon the litter of papers before his hands and nodded to it gravely.

"I do not think," he said, "that I have Carnardon's scruples in the matter of suicide. It seems to me that there are cases in which nothing else will avail, and it seems to me that my case is one of these. I am not a coward, I fancy—" He spoke in a tone of halfquestioning deprecation, as if he were quite open to argument or to denial, "but, in so far as I am able to judge, my life is a menace and a harm to several people. God knows it is a weariness to myself. In so far as I am able to judge, my life were better out of the way." He raised the pistol and snapped open the breech, whirling the loaded cylinder under his thumb. There was a faint odour of oil and of corroding brass from the greased cartridges. He snapped the breech shut again, and looked with a certain cool, impersonal curiosity into the black bore where death lay, and a quick solving of all puzzles, a quick severing of the knot which, it seemed, was so far beyond his power to undo.

"I have no moral scruple," he said again, slowly. "Certainly I am not afraid, and yet—one shrinks. A natural distaste for death, very likely. They say that suicide is impossible save through temporary insanity. I wonder. No, that's a lie. There was von Bienach." He spoke of a Prussian friend of his who had unwittingly brought disgrace upon himself and through himself upon his regiment. His colonel and major had sent him, by messenger, a pistol, and von

Bienach had, obediently and quite calmly, shot himself, in his rooms.

"One shrinks," said young Tommy, nodding at the pistol which he had again laid upon the litter of papers before him. "I wonder why? Perhaps, after all, it is fear—not fear of dying, but fear of what's beyond. I wonder. Now here am I," he said, setting himself, as it were, to argument. "Here am I, ready to quit an intolerable life for my own good and for the good of several others. I claim a right to go. I am eager to go, and yet—something holds my hand. What? Is there something beyond that warns, or does living flesh dread the cold?—Gad, that's like Hamlet!—Oh, to the devil with quibblings!" he cried in a little burst of anger. Then he laughed.

"Come, we'll toss for it!" said Tommy, grimly humorous. "Heads I go. Tails I stay." He felt in his pockets and brought out a half-dollar. "Three

tosses," said he, "and heads I go!"

The coin whirled and fell, noiseless, on the papers.

"Heads!" said young Tommy, laughing.

The coin spun again, and rolled a little way, and fell, balancing to the last. Tails.

"Fate's a sporting lady!" said the man. "She

likes a long race. Once again, now!"

The silver coin flashed in the lamp-light and fell, striking against the pistol, which lay there, with a sharp ring, and falling half under it. I think Tommy's hand shook, the least bit, as he lifted the weapon away. Tails!

"You would seem to have the better of it, Madame," said Tommy Carteret. But, at that, another little gust of anger shook him.

"There's no one here to see if I play fair or foul!"

he cried. "I'll toss again." The coin flashed and fell. Once, twice, three times. Tails all! Tommy Carteret cursed aloud in high, shrill tones. The game had, at last, I fancy, reached his deadened nerves.

After this, he fell once more into his brooding, staring silence, sunken a bit in the arm-chair, fingers playing and picking at the loaded pistol which had been cheated of its prey, lips moving from time to time in I know not what bitter, weary words. He sat there for hours and did not know that time passed.

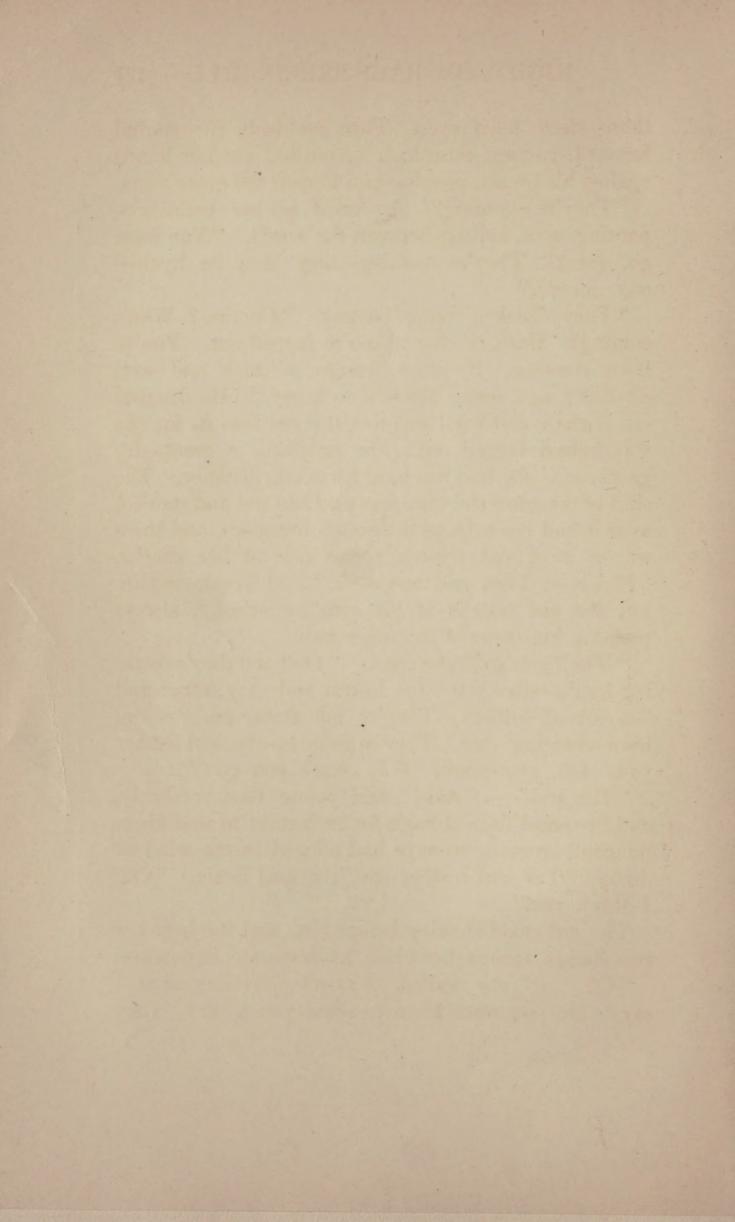
It was, I think, toward one or two of the morning when there came a low rapping at the door. Tommy, sunk in gloom and bitterness, heard nothing. The rapping came again, low, patient, insistent. Tommy, chin on breast, brooded on. The rapping came again, rose to sharpness, would not be denied. Tommy, still in his chair, lifted an alert head, and his eyes turned from side to side.

Who visited Half-Breed Hill at this dark hour? Jared, maybe, returned against orders to protect his master. Maybe—Tommy took up the loaded pistol and slipped it into the side pocket of his jacket—the right-hand pocket. Then he rose and went to the door. He stood there a moment, listening. There was no sound from outside. Tommy pulled the door open with his left hand, and his eyes narrowed to peer into the gloom without.

"You?" he said in a whisper. "You!" The girl brushed quickly past him into the room and closed the door behind her, standing against it. She was breathing hard, and her eyes were fixed upon those of young Tommy, who stood near, looking at her under his brows. For a moment it seemed as if she could not speak—as if she were frightened into silence by



"' 'They're—coming!' she cried in her breathless, panting voice, halting between the words"



those stern, fixed eyes. Then suddenly she started forward, coming close to him, putting out her hands against his breast, pushing him toward the inner room.

"They're—coming!" she cried in her breathless, panting voice, halting between the words. "You must go, quick! They're coming—they may be hyuh—

any minute."

"They?" asked young Tommy. "Coming? Who's coming? Here, sit down; you're fagged out. You've been running. By Jove, you're all torn and wet! Sit down and rest. There's no hurry." He dragged out a chair and tried to press the girl into it, for she was indeed fagged out. She breathed in great, dry gasps, as if she had run hard for a long distance. The skirt of the gown she wore was torn and wet and stained, as if it had been dragged through brambles, and there was a long, red scratch across one of her cheeks. "Please sit down and rest a bit," said Tommy again, but the girl caught at his arm hysterically, always pressing him toward the inner room.

"Won't you go!" she cried. "I tell you they're coming hyuh—after you—Joe Borral and—my father and—a lot of—others. They've got guns, and they've been—heating—tar. They're going to—tar and feather

you. Oh, go, quick! Why won't you go?"

"Tar and—— Aah!" said young Tommy slowly, and his mind flashed back for an instant to that keen, pungent, aromatic scent he had noticed in the wind at dusk. "Tar and feather me!" he said again. "Oh, I think not!"

The girl stood shaking before him, and she beat her two hands against her sides in desperate impotence.

"Oh, go!" she wailed. "Don't you hear what I say? Do you want them to—find you hyuh? They

was ready to start when I came away. Dad, he'd ben watching me all evenin'. I—couldn't get away before. He—went out for a minute to the others, and I—I ran. Please! please!" She began to sob, standing there in the lamplight, great, dry, gasping sobs of fright and nervousness and a fatigue which was on the verge of collapse.

"By Jove!" said young Tommy, "you're a brick! I—wish you hadn't come. I don't like your being mixed up in this nasty affair, but you're a brick. I think you're the pluckiest woman I ever knew. No, I won't go; I'll stop where I am, but I won't be tarred and feathered, either—not alive, that is—so don't

you worry.

"I shall be all right. You've warned me, and I shall be ready for them. Now, go, please! You can't do anything more. You've done your part like a brick. Go out this way, through the other room and the kitchen. I've a few preparations to make, and then we'll see how fast those chaps'll tar and——" He halted suddenly to listen, and the girl's sobbing also broke abruptly into silence. There were sounds of footsteps outside the cabin.

"They've lost no time!" said young Tommy, with a grim little laugh. "Ah, well! they can't surprise me, anyhow. Now off with you, quickly! When you're outside, bolt for home." He pushed the girl, who was sobbing again under her breath and clinging to his arms, into the inner room, and pulled the hangings together after her. Outside, something rattled like a gun-butt dropped to the ground, and a man's voice spoke, low and muffled. Tommy set the long steamer chair across the room, near the outer door. It might prevent an organised rush. Then he waited.

There came a knocking at the door. Tommy stepped back against the opposite wall. His right hand hung at his side, a little behind him, so that what it held was in shadow.

"Come in!" he called.

The door opened slowly. What came in first was the barrel of a shot-gun. It was followed by old Dave Canfield, and he was followed by others, six armed men, dark, grim, still men, who stood grouped in the open doorway, looking silently at the lad across the

lamp-lighted room.

"Good evening!" said young Tommy. "A bit late for a call, what?" That second Tommy, who stood beside, critical, finger to pulse, was mildly amused to discover that in the lad, at this moment, there was no fear; rather an odd sense of elation, a quick appreciation of the humorous, a pleasurable excitement like the beginnings of intoxication. It would seem that Tommy Carteret was of the stuff of which fighters are made.

"Always bring the artillery when you call?" he inquired. "Must be in the way. Chap can't carry a gun and take off his hat at the same time—some chaps."

Old Dave Canfield dropped the butt of his gun to the floor and leaned forward upon the muzzle.

"We-all didn' come hyuh fo' to mek' a visit," he said.

"Oh!" said young Tommy, "I didn't know."

"We-all come," said the other man, "to invite you to a little party of ourn." The men behind him stirred, and one of them smothered a laugh.

"Would to-morrow do?" inquired young Tommy

pleasantly. "I was thinking of going to bed."

"The party is to-night," said old Dave Canfield. "We-all has ben a-cookin' up a nice mess of tar an'

feathers, what we thought you-all might enjoy. Like-wise they's a sh'ot ride afterwa'ds."

"And," said young Tommy, shifting to the other

foot, "what if I decline?"

"You'll go jes' the same," said old Dave. "On'y you'll go feet fust. What did you-all reckon we was

doin' with these hyuh guns?"

"I didn't know," said young Tommy. "I thought, maybe, you were afraid of the dark. Some people are. As a matter of fact," he said, pretending to hide a yawn, "my man Jared, who is just the other side of those curtains behind me, has had you covered, Canfield, ever since you came in. And you with the yellow beard, whatever your name is, I've you covered with this." He turned a bit, so that the lamplight flashed upon the pistol which he held in his right hand.

Another stir ran through the little group of men in the doorway, and old Dave Canfield half raised his

shot-gun.

"If I were you," said Carteret, "I shouldn't run unnecessary risks. Jared is quick-tempered, and you are a family man." He put out a foot and hooked a near-by chair, dragging it over to him. Then, always keeping an alert eye upon the faces before him, he sat down and tilted the chair back against the wall, after the fashion locally popular at Winston's.

"This is rude," he admitted, "but so are you, and I love to be comfortable. Now, in the matter of that

tar and feathers. What's it for?"

"I reckon you know, damn well, what it's for!" said old Dave Canfield, blackly. "I reckon you ain't surprised none. Maybe you think 'at because you've got city clo'es, an' think you're a heap better'n we-uns hyuh, you can come hyuh an' have anythin' you hap-

pens to lay yo' eyes on, an' want. Maybe you-all think it don' make no difference to we-uns if you get yo' han's on we-uns's daughters an' do what you like to with 'em. 'Maybe you thinks that's what we-all have gals fo'? Well, it ain't, an', by Gawd, we-all is aimin' 'at you should fin' out it ain't. I reckon 'at by mawnin' you-all will know mo' sense 'an you does now."

Tommy Carteret, tilted back in his chair, watchful, but smiling, shook his head.

"I reckon not," said he. Then he permitted himself to make a little gallery-play. The pistol-barrel, directed by his steady right hand, never wavered from the breast of the big, blond-bearded man who stood beside Dave Canfield, but, with his left hand, he felt in a waistcoat pocket, brought out a cigarette-case, chose a cigarette-brought out, in turn, a match-box and lighted the cigarette.

"I reckon not," said Tommy, blowing smoke artistically through his nose. It was a silly bit of bravado, I grant you, but I think it told on these grim men in the doorway. I think even I take a sneaking, halfashamed delight in the fact that Tommy could do it. He had other qualities that I love better, but this gay and debonair spirit of his in the face of overwhelming danger pleases me well. Inside, he may have been afraid. I do not know, but I love a laugh at peril, and I am glad Tommy laughed.

"As for your hints at my conduct," he went on presently, "I need scarcely say that they are lies. I think you know it, but perhaps these other-gentlemen do not." His eyes ran for an instant over the little group of faces. "I dare say," he said, "that you have been told a great lot of nonsense about me-otherwise, you

wouldn't be here. The facts are these. I found a young lady half-unconscious, over in the oak-flat, yonder. She had fallen while trying to get over a fence, and had broken her collar-bone. I helped her to get home. When we arrived there, her father gratefully blackguarded me in his best manner, and subsequently told lies about me to every one who would listen. That's all there was of it."

One or two of the men in the doorway laughed derisively, and some one from the rear called out:

"Oh, shut him up an' bring him along! Is we-uns a-goin' to spen' the night hyuh?" Old Dave Canfield started to raise his gun, but Tommy's pistol promptly shifted to his breast and the gun butt dropped once more.

"Jared and I mean to do our little best," said Tommy Carteret.

"It's a damn bluff!" said the voice from the darkness. "They ain't no Jared thah." And the group stirred a bit, shuffling its feet, and one or two of the gun-barrels pointed toward where Tommy sat, tilted back in his chair.

Tommy's feet came to the floor on either side of the chair, and he rose, kicking the chair from him. His back was against the wall, and the pistol-barrel never moved from its steady aim.

"As you like," said he. "I have five bullets. Canfield goes first; then you with the yellow beard, I think. As you like—Well?" He laughed again and spat the cigarette from his lips to the floor. Old Dave Canfield drew back a step, among his fellows, and there came a scuffling sound of preparation, a clicking as of gun-locks, a low word or two of parley. Then, quite suddenly, the portières in the doorway, at

Tommy's left, shook and opened, and one of the men across the room said:

"My Gawd!" in a high, amazed voice.

"Oh, why didn't you go!" cried Tommy, angrily. "I told you to go!" But the girl ran to him, and stood before him, clinging to his shoulders, and looking back across the room where stood her father and his friends.

"You'll never get him alive!" she said, "and you'll have to kill me, too, so you might as well begin, you—you—cowards!" Tommy fought her with his free left hand, trying to force her away out of danger, but the girl clung to him with all her strength, and she was very strong, keeping her body between him and the men in the doorway.

"Go away!" cried young Tommy. "For God's sake, go! This is no place for you! Won't you go?" And then, at something he saw, he made a last desperate effort and threw her from him, so that she fell upon her hands and knees on the floor, at some little distance.

"Keep down!" he cried sharply. "Lie down on the floor!"

A man had forced his way through the little group opposite—a man who shrieked horrible, blasphemous curses. It was Joe Borral, white-faced, eyes blazing. He held his shot-gun ready in his hands, and as he reached the front rank of the group of men he raised it, cursing aloud, and fired. The explosion roared and crashed in the small room, and filled all the air with that bitter, acrid powder-smoke which blinds the eyes and clutches at the throat intolerably. But Tommy had seen what was coming, and he was quicker than the other man. The charge of buckshot ripped harmlessly through the pine ceiling, and when the others had to some degree fought the smoke from

eyes and mouths, they saw that Tommy Carteret stood in the middle of the room, feet apart, hands clutched about the throat of something which looked like a dummy—a suit of clothes stuffed out with bits of rag. They saw him shake this thing, forward and back, side to side, until its head rolled ludicrously upon its shoulders, and its boots flapped and clattered upon the boards of the floor.

At last, when his strength was spent, he flung the thing, with a final effort, at their feet, where it rolled, whimpering, and stepped back to his place against the wall. And the girl crept again toward him, slipping into his hand the pistol which he had dropped, and rose, clinging to his breast—hiding her face there, and sobbing.

Tommy slid a spent left arm about her shoulders, and over her head his fierce eyes sought through the floating smoke for Dave Canfield's face.

"Your daughter," he said, between breaths of exhaustion, "came here to-night to warn me that you—blackguards were—coming for me. I thought she had—gone home again. I—begged her to go."

"I reckon," said old Dave Canfield, thickly, "'at it ain't the first time she's ben hyuh. I reckon she knows

the way."

"You're a damned liar!" said Tommy Carteret, "and if you weren't her father I'd shoot you here and now for what you've said. As a matter of fact, however, she has a perfect right to be here. She has promised to marry me at as early a date as she can arrange for."

The girl started suddenly in his arm, with a little, low cry, and Dave Canfield's face gaped through the smoke-wreaths, mouth open.

"Marry!" he said in a whisper, and the big man with the yellow beard burst out into a great roar of

laughter.

"Why the—why the—why didn't ye say so?" he demanded. "Think we-all hasn't got nothin' better to do 'an hettin' up tar an' a-spoilin' feather beds for a man what's a-goin' to be married? Ain't such a man got trouble enough a-comin' to him 'ithout we-uns addin' unto it! Why didn't ye let on to Dave 'at ye wanted fo' to marry the gal?"

"I hadn't a chance," said Tommy. "He always

side-stepped when I came near."

The big man with the yellow beard turned about to

his fellows. He was still laughing.

"I reckon this hyuh sure spiles we-all's game," he said. "I reckon we-all hasn't got nothin' mo' to do 'an to git out." There was mingled laughter and protest from the other men, an angry word or two from some one who did not relish being cheated out of his night's entertainment, but the yellow-bearded giant pushed and hustled them, one by one, out of the doorway. Old Dave Canfield was the last to go-old Dave, staring and speechless still, and dragging by the arm a thing which writhed and wept and babbled stammering, impotent curses. Then the door slammed, and Tommy Carteret was left alone in the cabin on Half-Breed Hill with his newly acquired fiancée.

The girl moved a few, uncertain steps away from him, and stood beside the writing-table, fingering the papers and pens which lay there. Her head was bent and turned a little away, but the neck and ear, which Tommy could see, burned crimson.

"Well?" said he presently, standing by his wall, and the girl's head rose to his word. Tommy saw her hand shake on the littered papers, but her eyes were dark and steady.

"I reckon you'll—be going now," she said. "You

can—get away early in the morning."

"Going?" said he. "Going where? What do you mean?" The girl took a faltering step toward him, one hand out before her as if she were blind. Her eyes never left his face.

"You didn't mean—" she said in a whisper, "You weren't really—telling the—truth? You don't wan—" Tommy smiled into her eyes, and the girl dropped forward upon his breast with a great sob, and

lay there shaking from head to foot.

He said to himself that he was glad. He said it a bit fiercely, a bit defiantly, staring hollow-eyed over the girl's head into the red glow of the lamp. He said that Fate had managed the whole thing for him, that Fate which had played against him when he tossed for life or death; and that he had had nothing to do with the choice. Anyhow, the choice was made; and he was glad. After all, why not? Henry Carnardon was right. Here was, at any rate, a man's life to live. What's a man's life with no woman in it?—Exile? Aye, but why not a sweetened exile? Not an unpleasant burden, this, clinging and sobbing on one's breast. A warm, breathing burden, egad, to cheer one's solitude, to make one forget what must be forgotten! He laughed as he bent the girl's head back and bent over it to kiss her, and he watched for and welcomed the inward stir, the quickened blood, that her mouth's warm clinging wakened in him. Here's a Tommy I would hide from you if I might, if I had not set out to tell plain truth, to conceal nothing. Aye, here's a Tommy I could weep for, a desperate, maddened Tommy, spurring himself on to the commonest, cheapest passion, all to the end that he might not think—all to blind his eyes and deafen his ears against those terrors which he knew waited only for solitude to engulf him. It is a picture I see often—against my will, for I do not love it—poor Tommy holding and kissing his gipsyish hill girl there in the lamplight, and ever, between kisses, looking up over her head with shrinking, dreading eyes at the shadows which wait outside the lamp's red glow—shadows which lurk and nod, biding their time, biding their time.

He sent the girl home as quickly as possible, with

promises for the morning.

"We must give those chaps no more chance to talk than we can help," he said. "They'll be watching to see if you stay here." And he would have crossed the bottom with her to see her safe in her cabin, but that she would not have—wept, stormed, refused to move a step. She held that she herself was safe, but that Tommy's life walked, that night, upon a razor's edge, and at the last he let her go.

And so here the curtain should go down on this night's work. The others are off the stage. Tommy remains alone. There is but one thing left to do. I see him lock and bolt the doors, make lights in the sleeping-room, stand a moment beside the writing-table with his hand uplifted to the red lamp, and then—his eyes fall upon that which sits and smiles within the Temple

gate.

"Sib! Sib!" says young Tommy with an exceedingly bitter cry, and sobs take hold upon him by the throat—a man's sobs, great and dry and very terrible, and shake him from head to foot.

An hour later, when something like control has once

more come to him, I see the last and bitterest thing of that long night. I see young Tommy take down from the wall the Temple gate and, drawing out of it the photograph which had been there, tear the picture across twice and drop the pieces upon the floor. Then I see him turn out the red lamp and go to his bed, swaying a little in his walk—like a drunken man.

#### CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST DAYS OF CARTER, OF HALF-BREED HILL

The wedding day was set for two weeks ahead. There seemed to be no reason or excuse for making a long engagement of it, no great preparations to go through with. Marriage is a simple matter in the hill country.

Over these two weeks I shall hurry with few words, partly because I have no heart for dwelling upon that time, and partly because there is little to record—little, that is, which would forward my tale; much if I should choose to take you into young Tommy's mind and soul. If I have before said that there dwelt two Tommies upon Half-Breed Hill, I might say it again, now at this point, with a double force. There were indeed two Tommies; one who sat each day with Mariana Canfield, laughed with her, held her, kissed her, talked with her about the life they two were to live together, painstakingly trained the baser part of himself to thrill at her touch, at her eager kisses, painstakingly buried from sight and thought the better part which cried out against this preposterous mis-mating, which shivered at the thousand little vulgarities the girl could not hide. The other Tommy was a white-faced, hollow-eyed ghost which raved through the wood-road at night, when Egypt was asleep, shouted curses to the velvet stars above, begged God to send his merciful thunders and slay, tossed sleepless, aye sobbing, in the fateful bed where little Mrs. Satterlee had died.

No, it will not bear dwelling upon, this stretch of time. Two things only I must record because they have a cer-

tain importance. I take them in their order.

Tommy had a caller one morning. It was two days after that night upon which tar had been heated and feathers prepared. Tommy was writing letters to certain banker people and trust companies—business letters. He had been over, earlier in the morning, across the bottom to interview old Dave Canfield as one is expected to interview the father of one's bride-to-be. Dave had been silent and, it would almost seem, awed. The old furtive hatred had shone unmistakably in his black eyes—he was not one to change his attitude, but he said nothing uncivil, made no outward show of hostility. If he felt surprise at the very considerable sum of money Tommy proposed to settle upon his wife, it was well concealed. He nodded consent to every suggestion, and he nodded when Tommy went away-nodded without offering his hand. He had, by the way, not even asked his visitor to be seated during the interview.

Tommy's caller was Mariana's elder sister, Rose Barrows, the woman he had met on the occasion of his first call at the Canfields', after Mariana's accident. He was, as I have said, writing busily, and did not see the woman until she spoke through the open doorway.

"Oh, good morning!" said young Tommy. "I beg your pardon for not seeing you. I was writing. Won't

you come in?"

"No, suh, thank you!" said the woman. "I'll just set down hyuh on the do'step in the shade. I was a-goin' home from the Crimmins's," she explained, "by the sho't cut acrost the bottom, an' I reckoned I'd set a

minute ef you was hyuh." The prity in her face and a certain diffident emparation in her manner which made Tommy narrow his eyes curiously as he sat watching. He did not believe that the woman had merely happened in as she said, and he wondered idly what she wished to say to him. He had seen her not more than half a dozen times, for, like the other members of the family, she had kept well out of his way when he had been calling upon Mariana, but he had always liked a certain kindly, unassuming frankness which she bore. He had, once or twice, taken enough interest in her to say to himself that she was doubtless a better woman with more womanly qualities than Mariana could ever by any possibility possess.

She looked up at him from her seat on the doorstep, and her square, kindly face was still grave and, it seemed to him oddly, almost compassionate, as if she understood.

"It's on'y two weeks off, ain't it?" she said.

"Less than that," said young Tommy. "Twelve days, I believe." The woman nodded, turning her face away. Then once or twice again she opened her mouth to speak, but halted before the words came, as if she lacked courage or could not frame what she wished to say, until at last she turned to him with a little impatient gesture.

"I'm sorry!" she said simply. "I wish't it didn'

have to be. I'm sorry."

Oddly enough, young Tommy felt no impulse toward expressing conventional astonishment or denial or anything of that sort. He felt at once that this woman knew, and it did not seem strange that she should speak out.

"You're wrong, you know," said he. "It is for the

very of that." But the woman shook her neau, looking at him with that queer half-

compassion.

"You don' believe that," said she. "An' anyhow, I know better. Look hyuh!" She leaned toward him anxiously. "Couldn' you get out of it, even now? Couldn' you go away, somewheres? Never mind—us. Never mind Marianner. She'd get over it. Couldn' you do that?"

Tommy frowned down at the woman perplexedly. She went further than he had expected, and he did not

quite make her out.

"Of course not!" he said sharply. "That is out of the question. But why? Why do you want me to go away?"

"Because you won' be happy hyuh, married," said

she.

"Are you afraid," demanded young Tommy, "that I sha'n't make your sister happy? Is that what you are afraid of?"

"I ain't a-thinkin' about her," said the woman. "She'll be happy enough, I reckon. She'll have mo' money 'an she's ever had, an' clo'es an' things. I ain't a-thinkin' about her; I'm a-thinkin' about you." Her face flushed a little, and her two coarse, reddened hands worked together nervously, wrapping themselves in the folds of her apron and straining against each other upon her knees. "It's a-goin' to be hell for you, ain't it?" she said.

Tommy stared at her curiously. He could not in the least make her out. He could not understand why she should say this sort of thing to him unless she had some ulterior motive.

"On the contrary," he said stiffly, "I expect to be

very happy indeed." He felt that this was a very poor and coarse and unfair weapon to use, but he could not rid himself of the suspicion that the woman had come to him for some purpose other than kindliness—perhaps to find out something, perhaps to get him away for reasons of her own. "I don't understand," he said, shaking his head.

The woman breathed a little sigh and started to rise. "It seems it ain't no use," she said. "You—you understan' well enough, but—— No, it ain't no use, I reckon." But once again the odd look of distressed sympathy came strongly into her face, and she turned

to him with a gesture of appeal.

"Won' you believe me?" she cried. "Cain't I make you believe 'at I'm honest about it? I'm sorry fo' you; honest I am. You ain't a-goin' to be happy. It's a-goin' to be hell fo' you, an' you know it. I tell you, she ain't fitten to marry you, Marianner ain't! I don' care ef she is my sister. Her an' you-all ain't the same kin'. People ought fo' to marry their own kin'. Animals an' birds an' all them does, an' I reckon humans is so too. You don' know Marianner. You think she's pretty an' young an' 'at you can stan' it because of that, but she ain't a-goin' to be pretty always. She ain't so likely now as she was a year ago. . . . How ol' d'you reckon I be?" She looked up at him with her square, coarsely handsome face quivering with such flushed earnestness that young Tommy could no longer mistrust her. There was only truth and sincerity there, and he instinctively felt it.

"Oh, I—I'm sure I don't know!" he said. "I'm no judge, you know. I——" The woman cut in swiftly.

"You'd say I was thirty-five, wouldn' you?" she demanded. "Well, I ain't. I'm on'y twenty-three.

We're all that a-way hyuh. Marianner is eighteen. When she's twenty she'll look like me. She'll be fat, too—fatter'n me. When she's thirty, she'll be an ol' woman."

Tommy shook his head with a little weary gesture.

"I'm afraid that doesn't make any difference," said he. "One doesn't expect a girl to remain beautiful forever. Are you suggesting that I should run away

because Mariana will one day be old?"

"They's mo' 'an that!" she swept on eagerly. "They's wo'se things 'an that. I tell you you don' know her. She's—mean, Marianner is. I've knew her all her life, an' I ought to know. She's mean. She tells lies, an'— Why shouldn' she? Look what she come from? You've seen my paw! A gal cain't have a paw like that an' take nothin' from him. She's like paw when she's sot her min' about anythin'. An' they's other things too. W'en she's madded she'll do anythin'. She throwed a lamp at paw once't, a lighted lamp, jes' because she was madded. Oh, I wish't you'd go away!"

Tommy leaned forward in his chair, frowning down

perplexedly at Rose Barrow's flushed face.

"I don't understand," he said again. "Why should you come to me and tell me all these things? Granted they're true, why should you tell me? Don't you care for your sister? Don't you want her to marry me? It seems so—such a very odd thing for a sister to do!"

The woman rose, shaking her head. "No," said she. "I reckon you don' understan'. I reckon you wouldn'. I jes' thought 'at it was a pity fo' it to happen 'at you should marry her, not knowin' mo' about her 'an you does. It seems to me 'at it's a-goin' to be hell all aroun'. Marianner ought to 'a' married Joe Borral. He's her kin'. Ef she was mean an' ornery Joe'd 'a' beated her.

You wouldn'. I reckon I thought you was bein' fo'ced into it somehow, one thing an' another. I know a man gets lonesome when he's alone an'—an' in trouble. I know 'at he'll do a'mos' anythin' to have it differen'. An' what they-all ben a-sayin'—all them lies, an' all—I thought— Well, it don' matter nohow. I reckon it ain't none o' my business." She took up her basket and moved away. "I was sorry fo' you, that was all," she said.

Tommy started up to call her back, but words would not come to him. There was no drawing back now. The thing had gone too far. Twenty-three! Yes, she looked thirty-five, or more.

"Marianner is eighteen. W'en she's twenty she'll look like me."

No more letter-writing for Tommy that day.

I said that there were two things which I must record. The other thing came a few days after this. Jared the admirable returned one day at mid-morning from the village, where he had gone on certain matters of business. He had ridden the mare instead of driving her to the cart, and sat lounging easily in the saddle in the shade before the cabin door the while he made his report to his master. Jared was overlong of speech and full of detail. I think I have said that he was a gossip. On this morning he had various unimportant happenings to relate, but young Tommy, immersed in a letter from his banking people, did not trouble to listen until a significant word caught his ear.

"What's that?" he demanded, looking up. "Say

that again."

"Nothin' much," averred the admirable Jared. "I jest said 'at it appeared we was up agin' thet there forren competition the Effingham paper is a-talkin' so much

about. I see two dago men a-walkin' along the village road this mawnin'. Black as niggers they was, 'ith red sashes on like a woman, an' a-jabberin' their foolish talk like damned parrots. I reckon they was lookin' for farm-work—an' after harvest, too!"

Young Tommy's face set hard and white. "Get off the mare!" he said. "Look sharp! Have you ridden

her hard?" Jared slid to the ground, staring.

"No, sir," said he. "I walked her a'most all the way home. She's fresh as paint. Why, what the—Hell!" Young Tommy was off at a canter with never another word, and the admirable Jared stared after him open-mouthed.

"Now what the devil does he want 'ith a dago man?" demanded Jared indignantly. "Ain't I good enough

for him?"

Tommy, out on the main road, pressed hard, and the mare laid back her ears and shook an angry head. She had been looking forward to a day of oats and contem-

plation.

"It may be nothing!" said the man between his teeth; "but it may be—my God! Get on, you beast; get on! Did I ask Jared whether they were going toward the village or from it? No, I didn't. Ass!" He bent forward over the mare's neck, and that discontented animal seemed to realise that fear was abroad, for she settled to her work, up-hill and down, never slackening, and I rather think she made a record for that stretch of five miles.

In the box-bordered drive which turned in from the highroad Tommy came upon the man Peters. Peters was walking, and he had several parcels in his arms. There was dust upon his gaiters, so that it would seem he had walked from the village. He touched his cap

respectfully to Tommy and went to the mare's head when Tommy prepared to dismount.

"Have you been away from the house long?" asked

Tommy.

"A matter of two hours, sir," said the servant. "Lord Henry was just finishing breakfast when I left, sir." He stared, with as much curiosity as a well-bred servant may display, at Carteret's set face and at his quick, abrupt speech.

"My man Jared saw two Italians in the village road this morning," said Tommy, and the man's face went suddenly white, and his hand dropped from the mare's

bridle.

"My God, sir!" he cried under his breath, and began all at once to tremble very violently, like a man seized by

ague.

"Oh, come, come!" said young Tommy, and tried to put cheerfulness and security into his tone. "Don't take it like that. We mustn't be frightened until there's something to fear. I came here because I thought Lord Henry ought to be warned, in case—— Probably they were common workingmen. Buck up, Peters!" He clapped the man reassuringly on the shoulder and ran up the steps of the porch.

One of the long windows which gave upon this porch was open. Tommy hesitated a moment before it, for he felt hardly intimate enough with Henry Carnardon to burst in upon him through open windows. This errand, however, gave him excuse. As he stepped into the cool dimness within, he heard breathing behind him, and the man Peters was at his shoulder. Tommy nodded and went quickly along the narrow hallway

into which the window opened.

At the door of the square, book-lined study he paused.

The room was dim and shadowy as always, cool and faintly odorous of leather, but some upper panels of the Venetian shutters had been opened to the morning, so that a shaft of sunlight, yellow and warm and golden, slanted down upon the great square writing-table where papers and open books and writing things lay confused.

Lord Henry Carnardon sat in his chair at the big table. His back, bent studiously forward, was toward the doorway. Tommy gave a sudden little laugh of relief, but, even as he laughed, the man Peters's hand shot out over

his shoulder, pointing.

"Look, sir, look!" said Peters's whisper, and Tommy looked. A crumpled square of white paper lay against Henry Carnardon's back, just between the shoulders.

When Tommy reached the chair by the writing-table—I think he had stood in the doorway, stiffened, bereft of movement, while one might count to a dozen—he saw what held the crumpled square of paper to the broad bent back. The handle of a knife stood out there—an old knife, Sicilian of make, wrought before the law which now obtains prohibited the sale or carrying of such. On the paper a single word had been scrawled by a finger dipped in red:

## TRADITORE

The man was quite dead—dead and cold, and grimly, terribly heavy as Tommy Carteret lifted the fallen head and shoulders to search for signs of life. It would seem that he had been struck stealthily, from behind, while he was writing, for two written sheets lay there, and a third, half written, with blots and splashes where his falling body had rolled the inked pen upon it. He had been struck deeply, too; he had died in a moment, for

there was no sign of any struggle. There had been but one movement—that dead collapse forward upon the

written papers.

It was in Tommy's mind to raise the heavy body, to lay it in decency and dignity upon a couch or upon its bed as a dead man should lie, but, as his hand went out toward the Sicilian knife-handle, he halted. There were the coroner and his grim offices to think of. Nothing must be disturbed.

"Nothing but this," said Tommy to himself, and pulled the crumpled red-scrawled paper from the dead man's back and slipped it into his pocket. No prying, curious eyes should spell out that word over Henry Carnardon's dead body, and ask what it meant and

discover that it meant disgrace.

He rose sighing, and the man Peters stood across the table, his two hands over his face, shaking to and fro with sobs. Tommy went quickly to the cabinet where the decanters and bottles stood, and returned with a glass half full of whiskey.

"Drink that!" he said to the servant. "Drink all of it, and pull yourself together. There will be a great deal to do." The man drank, holding the long glass to his lips with both hands. Then, when he had finished, he gave an odd, great shiver and was himself again.

"Thank you, sir!" he said. "I shall—do nicely now, sir. I know what must be done. Lord Henry has often told—talked of this—this that has happened. If you—don't mind, sir, I think you would better not be mixed up in it. You know what these people are, here, sir. I can do everything."

"Never mind about the people," said young Tommy.
"I must help you with the arrangements." But the

servant shook his head.

"If you don't mind, sir," he said, respectfully stubborn, "I think Lord Henry wouldn't like it. Everything was arranged long since. His Lordship expected this. He has been expecting it for years. If you don't mind, sir, I can look after it all. I shall—take his Lordship's body back to England and tell the Duke what Lord Henry has told me to tell him." There was a certain determination about the man which Tommy knew must come from some previous instructions on the part of his dead master, and there was nothing to do but give way before it.

"As you like," said he, "but, if you find any difficulty in your way or need any assistance, you know where I am to be found. I might at least send the coroner to

you from the village."

"If you would be so good, sir," said the man. He was leaning over the table where Henry Carnardon had been writing, and he lifted the three sheets of newly inscribed paper.

"I think this is meant for you, sir," he said. "It

bears your name."

Tommy took the sheets into his hand, and the hand shook a little. Words from a man who is dead come

strangely solemn.

"My dear Carteret—" had said Henry Carnardon with death at his elbow, "I think the thing for which I have been waiting twenty very long years is at hand. There are two Italians in the neighbourhood—Sicilians. I saw them by sheer accident, an hour ago, as I walked in my front garden with the collie pup. They were sitting by the roadside to rest themselves, and I heard their voices through the lilac hedge. Also, I managed to obtain a glimpse of their faces, and they are not, I believe, the ordinary workingmen they attempt to repre-

sent by their costume. A bit of their conversation I overheard, and—I shall not bore you with it, but it almost convinces me of the men's mission here.

"Peters has gone to the village, and I am alone in the house. I have taken ordinary precautions. I have locked the doors and shut myself in. I do not, however, believe that even if these two know I am here and have come to kill me they will make the attempt by day. I expect they will do it at night. In any case, I am writing this by way of a sort of contingent good bye to you. The danger I feel myself to be in may be a fancied one. In that case I shall tear these words up. But somehow I feel strongly that the time is at hand and, my friend, I am glad, glad! In certain ways, too, I am sorry, for your coming here has made a great difference. We should have become fast friends, I know. Do you remember my telling you of the two prophecies about my death—that it would come when I had reached the half-century? I told you also that I should be fiftyone years old on the first day of the coming September? September first is next Tuesday. Odd, eh?—I write too much and rather at random. I had meant this to be but a word-nay, two-'good bye'-I find myself wondering, very thoughtfully and gravely, as I stand on the threshold—do I, indeed, stand there?—what your life is to be. Is it to drag on as mine has done in a hell of exile or do the pages to come hold surprises? An odd and unreasonable conviction persists in me that it is to be the latter—surprises. What surprises, I wonder? At any rate, I hope and believe-"

Here Henry Carnardon's letter broke off abruptly, and here were the dried blots and smears of ink made by the falling pen. There was something unspeakably horrible in that unfinished sentence—those blots and

smears. It was as if the man had been calmly talking to young Carteret in his own person and had fallen dead between two words.

The written sheets slipped from Tommy's hand, and a sudden little fit of shivering madness swept over him. His twitching hand caught blindly at the dead man's shoulder, and a great bitter cry burst from him.

"Carnardon, Carnardon! Are you going to leave

me alone, here? Carnardon, Carnardon!"

## CHAPTER XV

## THE REAPING OF THE WHIRLWIND

A MAN's first waking thoughts on the morning of his wedding day should make interesting reading—his very first thoughts as he opens his eyes, blinking, and digs a sleepy fist into them, and yawns, and says to himself: "Another day! What's on for to-day?" and then gives a great leap of mingled terror and delight (I'll wager a goodly sum with you, Madame, that terror is, for the moment, uppermost) as he realises what is on for to-day. The last waking to freedom—even though it be a hateful freedom! To-morrow morning he wakes, the head of a family, with grim responsibility furrowing his brow. I fancy I see him squirm nervously under the blankets. I fancy I feel with him the hair at the back of my head stir and rise as awful, prophetic strains of the weddingmarch chant through the room. Above all things, I should like a scrap-book filled with these thoughts—the thoughts of the men I have known, now gone under the yoke—unexpurgated, unspoiled by tactful later revision. They would be interesting documents, I promise you: something to laugh over-but not altogether; to weep over-not very seriously; to envy-perhaps.

And the first pages of my scrap-book I should have reserved for the thoughts of Thomas Carteret 2nd—alias Carter of Half-Breed Hill—on a certain early September morning that I know of; but Tommy has told me that there were no thoughts worth recording—at

least, no dramatic moment given over to them, no

sudden waking to mingled terror and joy.

He was, indeed, awake the greater part of the night. He sat under the red lamp, alternately puffing great clouds from the old brier pipe, and scribbling in the little journal disconnected strange bits of nonsense.—Even to my eye which loves the working of a mind under strain, the stuff is nonsense. Henry Carnardon's death was heavy upon him—this I gather from the journal—and it seems to have been more in his mind than his own affairs. He went to bed, some time after midnight, but he slept fitfully, waking often and staring wide-eyed into the dark. Several times he rose and moved about the cabin aimlessly, without purpose. Once he opened the door and, pajama-clad as he was, went out into the dew-wet grass before the doorstep.

It was well into the gray dawn, and birds and insects clamoured from the oak flat near by. A wind, raw and sharp for that season, tore past from the north, and clouds scudded overhead. To the eastward the sun was waking, and all the torn ragged sky there was crimson and angry—an unlovely sky, a portentous sky—"Red in the morning, sailors' warning." Under it the house on the Dutch Creek road lay dark and still, sleeping, as it were, all unconscious of the crimson peril

which hung over it.

Tommy wondered if the girl there was asleep or, like himself, watching the night pass. Asleep, probably. Her nerves were sound. The wind bit through the thin silk of his jacket and shrieked suddenly in the tree-tops, and Tommy shivered and turned back into the cabin. He was unaccountably restless and full of an odd dread which he could not fathom. It was not the wedding which drew hourly nearer upon him; not the fact that

this was the last day of bachelorhood. He had, in the past fortnight, fought all that out at length until rebellion had laid down its arms in sheer weariness and despair. He was even, in a fashion, glad, for he thought that, for a time at least, recollection might be smothered in—no, not love, but love's substitutes. She was a handsome girl, and a man's a man!

It was not his marriage which drove him to this odd fever of unrest, but something further, beyond the reach of knowledge or imagination—some strange premonition. Who was it had felt like this before a certain

calamity? Who was it had said:

"My old bones presage—" Ah, Arabella Crowley, enacting Cassandra at the Devereux's ball! That
prescience of evil which she felt so strongly must have
moved in her like this. Evil? Aye, but what evil now?
Had not the gods already done their worst? Tommy
threw himself wearily down upon poor Mrs. Satterlee's
fateful bed and tried to close his eyes, but sleep would
have none of him. He was up, pacing about like a
wakeful cat, in ten minutes.

"It's no good!" he said, sighing. "There are devils in me." And he sat down at the writing-table, pulling the curtains from the window to let in the brightening day. He wrote three or four business letters of small importance, and, after a half-hour of frowning meditation, a brief note to old Arabella Crowley, stating that he was, on that day, to be married, and asking her to inform his father. I have read that note. It is as curt as a word of instruction to one's solicitor; but I think old Arabella understood. After this he tubbed and dressed at leisure, and spent an hour over a book until breakfast time came and with it the admirable Jared. Jared had emulated the early bird. He had made a sunrise visit

to the village, and carried an armful of parcels, one of

them of a portentous aspect—borne gingerly.

"I bought me a new hat," said he with June-rose blushings of pride. "I ain't aimin' to be nowise a blot on this hyuh weddin' party. I aims to be fine as any-body." He removed the wrappings from the new hat and awesomely set that article upon his head. It was a silk hat, shaggy of plumage, curly and wide of brim, belled of crown, an ancient beaver. It antedated Jared by many years—a thing to frighten horses with, to awe young children into stricken silence. Jared coquetted before a near-by mirror, and his master bestowed praise.

"You will completely put me in the shade," he said.
"No one will believe that I am the groom. They'll think I am a mere coachman or something. Were

there letters?"

Jared, flushed with vain satisfaction, produced two. "They was a telegraph," he said, searching his pockets, "but I'm dumbed of I ain't lost it. D'ye reckon it was important? Ef it was, I could go back to Winston's an' git another copy. They'd be sure to remember the wo'ds."

"It doesn't matter," said young Tommy. "I know what it was. It was from a bank. To-morrow will do

well enough. The operator won't forget."

Somehow the interminable day wore through to its close. The wedding was to take place in the evening at the little church of the Hard-Shell Baptists in the village. The wedding party was to drive thither, with the cool of the evening, in wagons and carts, and, after the ceremony and the wedding supper at the so-called hotel across the common from Winston's, Tommy was to drive his bride home to Half-Breed Hill, behind the faithful mare.

He himself would greatly have preferred a quieter affair—a simple ceremony at the Canfield home, and none of this parade, but Mariana had insisted. She had no mind to be cheated out of her little display, and Tommy gave in to her.

The day wore through. It was an unpleasant day. That cold wind of the early morning had brought rainclouds, and then, dying, had left a sultry, oppressive heat which endured till nightfall. There was thunder from time to time; low, distant, growling thunder, with flashes of heat lightning but no rain—only those black still clouds and the hot still air. The birds chirped disconsolately and went to bed at noon. Smoke rose straight and unwavering from the chimney, and, high in the air, spread into a flat dark cloud which hung as motionless as the clouds above it.

At six of the evening the rain still threatened, with lightning flashes and mutterings of thunder, but still bode its time. Thanks to the low-hanging mass of cloud, it was almost dark—a green, unwholesome darkness-and Tommy, at his dressing in the stifling cabin, had to light the lamps. This dressing, like the triumphal procession and the hotel dinner, pleased him not at all, but Mariana had begged him to appear en grande tenue, and he had no good reason for refusing. As he knotted his lawn tie, the admirable Jared, looking somehow small and wasted under that hat of ceremony, drove up with the wagon and team borrowed from his brother. Another man sat in the wagon with him, but sprang out when the wagon stopped, and, after a few words with Jared, waved his hand and walked away eastward, as if he meant to cross the Little Bottom toward Dutch Creek road. Tommy came to the door, coatless, with a hair-brush in either hand.

"Who was that?" he asked. The admirable Jared scowled uneasily across the bottom where the other

man had gone.

"It was Jim Patterson," he said. "You know Patterson—big, high man 'ith a yallow beard. He was one of them as come that there night fo' to tar an' feather ye." Tommy laughed, remembering the blond giant who had hustled his fellows out of the cabin on that memorable occasion, but as he was turning back to his interrupted toilet, Jared, still scowling uneasily, spoke again.

"This ain't no time fo' to be a-spreadin' bad news, nor yet to fright ye onless it's necessary," he said, "but they's somethin' queer goin' on, an' you-all ought to

know about it."

"Queer?" said young Tommy. "How, queer?

What do you mean?"

"Old Dave Canfield," said Jared, "has gone an' lit out, somewheres. He ain't ben seen sence mawnin'." Tommy frowned. A last bit of old Dave's hostility, it would seem.

"Ah, well!" said he, "we can get on without him, I expect."

"He took his gun," said Jared.

"Well?" demanded young Tommy.

"An' Patterson," continued Jared, "heared some talkin' a-goin' on, yisteddy, 'bout how Joe Borral an' old Dave an' some o' them others was aimin' to make trouble. I dunno. Maybe it's all brag, but—I dunno. Joe Borral's ben nigh crazy sence ye shook him up, that night. What do ye think on it?"

Tommy looked up at the black-green rainclouds for

a long time in silence.

"I don't know what to think of it," he said at last, and he shook his head, sighing. "I've given up laughing at these people. They're—they're beyond me. I'm willing to believe anything of them. I expect we'd best go on over to the Canfields' as we had intended. We can tell the women and see what they think. Let them decide."

He pulled on his coat and threw a long rain-coat into the wagon in case of later need. Then, as if by an afterthought, and while Jared was tying the mare, hitched to her cart, at the tail-board of the wagon, he went back and took up the pistol with which, on that other night, he had held off his would-be entertainers, and he slipped it into the pocket of his coat. One could never be sure of what might happen in this God-forsaken land.

Beside the Canfield home on Dutch Creek road another wagon stood waiting with Mariana's young brother proudly erect on its seat. He was in his rusty best, with a preposterous bow of white ribbon slowly choking him to death. Another bow of like proportions ornamented the driving-whip. Patterson, the yellowbearded, stood at the wheel, chatting with the lad. He nodded affably to Tommy Carteret, and Tommy ob-

served that he carried a shot-gun.

The three women, Mariana, her mother and her sister, Rose Barrows, waited on the side porch. Tommy's heart sank as his eyes fell upon the girl he was to marry. She, too, was in her best, her awful best, and it sat very ill upon her. It was as if, by some strange freak of magic, the costume accentuated in her certain unfamiliar traits-unlovely traits which in her torn, soiled frocks of simple make had been hidden. She looked oddly like her sister, without her sister's kindliness. She looked older, less gipsyish. There was something tight about her neck, and over it her cheeks showed square and coarse, and her chin doubled. Her

waist was drawn too tight, and the lines of her bust above it were those of a woman of thirty. Also, she had been curling her hair. Under a too flamboyant hat it stood out about her head and cheeks in a mass of silly, wooly fluff—for all the world like a bath-sponge. This girl who had been, in her simple frocks of every day, a splendid beauty, looked, in her wedding dress, a vulgar, hard-eyed country belle—one to go with farmer lads to the local fair and giggle through a day of rough pleasantry. This was never the Mariana who had picked blackberries on that hot morning!

"Oh, my God!" said Tommy Carteret under his

breath, and the heart in him turned sick.

The girl ran eagerly down the steps of the porch to meet him. Half way she halted, for an instant, with a quick little breath of pleasure. She had never before seen Tommy in evening dress.

"You look like—like such a gentleman!" she said, and Tommy scowled. The speech went with her altered bearing. But quickly again the smile of

pleasure left her face.

"Has Jared told you?" she demanded. "Has he said that paw—that my father went away and hasn't come back?"

"Yes," said young Tommy. "He told me that and—that among other things. I was going to ask you what you thought it best to do. It may be—I don't want anything unpleasant to occur, you know. We might

possibly make some different arrangements."

"Different arrangements?" she cried, and her voice was sharp with anxiety and disappointment. "We won't do nothing of the kind. Who's afraid of them? Oh, you've been hearing about Joe Borral and them, have you? No, we won't make different arrange-

ments. We won't give them that much satisfaction. If they do anything, they'll make a row at the church. Well, who cares? They can't hurt us, can they? Mr. Patterson is going to take paw's place and ride in the other wagon with Rose and maw-mother."

Tommy frowned uncomfortably.

"I don't like-" he began, but the girl impatiently cut him short.

"Do you want to get out of it?" she demanded. tell you it's all right! Ah, no, no! I didn't mean that! Please forgive me! I'm nervous and mad and I didn't sleep last night. Really, though, it's all right. Those fools may make a row at the church, but I don't think so. I think they're just off getting drunk together." She turned to the blond-bearded Patterson, who lounged near.

"Don't you think so, Jim?" she asked. Patterson

shook his head.

"It mought be," he said. "It mought be. I reckon I don't know nothin' about it."

"If we are going," said young Tommy, "we'd best start, I think, before it is quite dark. It may rain before we reach the village. Look at those clouds!" A sinister, greenish light was abroad. The sun, near the western horizon, had found there a thinner veil, and it was less gloomy than an hour before, but the green light served only to outline the low masses of threatening cloud, to turn living faces into a corpse-like pallor, to fill hearts with foreboding.

Rose Barrows came down from the porch and she pulled the little white shawl which, in spite of the heat, she wore, closer about her shoulders with an uneasy

shiver.

"I'm-afeared," she said, appealing, as it were, to

Tommy Carteret. "Couldn't we send an' have the minister come out hyuh? I'm afeared o' them men."

But her sister blazed sudden anger.

"You're a miserable coward!" she cried. "If you want to stay home, stay there! Little I care about it!" And the elder woman turned heavily away toward her mother, who stood silent and well-nigh invisible in a

corner of the porch above.

Mariana Canfield and Tommy went in the first wagon, driven by the admirable Jared in his hat of pride. The faithful mare, drawing her cart, trotted behind, and after her came the other wagon with the two women and Jim Patterson. Patterson bethought him of a duty as he was mounting to his seat, and stepped across to where young Tommy was helping his bride over the wagon-wheel.

"Hyuh's a telegraph fo' you-all," he said. "I nigh forgot it. Young Sam, my boy, foun' it a-lyin' in the road this mawnin'. It ain't ben opened, so I reckon

you or Jared must 'a' dropped it."

"Jared lost it this morning," said young Tommy.
"Thanks very much." He nodded apologetically toward Mariana Canfield in her seat above him and tore open the yellow envelope. The message was short, but he had to read it many times over, for the words refused to mean anything. They shifted before his eyes and wheeled slowly about and made funny little nonsense phrases.

"John Hartwell died last night in street. Heart failure. Come. ARABELLA CROWLEY."

Tommy Carteret put up his arms over the high wagonwheel and laid his face upon them and fell into a fit of shaking, helpless, hysterical laughter. It was not until

the girl waiting above had spoken to him twice and finally cried out in a voice sharp with alarm that he

pulled himself together.

"It's-nothing!" he gasped, wiping his eyes. And he laughed again, looking up at her, quite uncontrollably, and stuffed his handkerchief in his mouth to smother the laughter. "It's nothing; only a—joke; the greatest joke ever-played in all the-world. Such a-" He shook convulsively as he climbed over the wheel.

"Drive on, Jared!" he said, and dropped into his seat with his hands over his face. The girl pressed him to explain, but Tommy shook his head, saying only that it was a great joke—the greatest joke in the world, and she drew a little away from him on the seat, frowning. But after a time, when they had turned from Dutch Creek road toward the village and were rolling along smoothly through the level, white dust, she crept again close to him, looking into his face and holding his arm with her two hands.

"The time's-come, at last, hasn't it?" she said in a half-whisper. "I-didn't think it ever could. It was too-beautiful to be true, but it's really, truly come, hasn't it?" And because she was very much in earnest and as deeply moved as her intense nature could be, she looked, for that instant, quite the old Mariana, in spite of the dreadful hat and the bath-sponge hair and the ill-chosen gown-quite the old Mariana, with the old charm and allurement.

Tommy, shaking his mood from him, slipped an arm about her waist and held her nearer, looking down into her face.

"I hope this—I hope you'll never be sorry for this," he said, "this marrying me. I'm not certain that I've got it in me to make anybody happy, but I'm going to spend my life trying. I'm going to be very good to you."

The girl smiled up at him through that yellow-green

gloom.

"I'm not afraid," she said. "I know you'll be good to me, and I—Oh, I'll be good to you, too! Honest, I will! You don't know how I—how much I—care about you—Oh!" She shivered and hid her face as a flash of lightning streaked through the clouds almost over their heads. A roar of thunder followed quickly—the storm was not far away now—and the horses which

drew the wagon plunged and shied.

"I have a rain-coat here," said Tommy, "in case you need it. It may not rain, you know. Sometimes this lightning goes on for a long time before the rain falls. Indeed, it has been at it all day, to-day. Why, you're trembling from head to foot! Are you afraid of the lightning? Come closer to me. Hide your face against my shoulder, so! He drew the girl into his arms, laughing half amusedly, and laid her face against his shoulder, but she raised herself, holding by her two hands until she could look into his eyes. Her face gleamed very white in the strange, greenish half-light.

"I'm afraid!" she cried, shivering. "I'm afraid all over! I hate thunder-storms, but I've never been afraid like this before. What is it? What's the matter with me? I'm horribly afraid. Oh, I wish we hadn't come!" The lightning flashed again, followed by its reverberating roll of thunder, and the girl screamed, hiding her face, but she was up once more in an instant,

holding by her two hands, white-faced.

"I'm afraid!" she cried again. "I'm horribly afraid. Do you think it could strike us—the lightning?

Do you think it would dare? Do you think it's trying to separate us-now at the last minute?"

Tommy laughed, drawing her closer into his arms.

"That is foolish!" he said. "The lightning won't strike us. We're perfectly safe. It's just an ordinary thunder-storm of the commonest sort. I'm sorry you're frightened. If I'd known, we wouldn't have started till the storm was over."

But the girl shook and trembled in his arms so violently that he was almost alarmed. He saw that

for some reason she was very badly frightened.

"Something's the-matter with me," she said. "I don't know-what it is. I'm afraid of everythingnot just the lightning. I feel as if something awful was going to happen. Do you think we ought to have come?—Ah, I'm afraid! I know it's foolish, but I can't help it. I'm afraid of—losing you. No, no! don't—laugh. I'm serious. The lightning might kill you—or me, any minute—Hold me—closer. Oh, what's the-matter with me? I've longed for-tonight so and—waited for it so!—If I should lose you now, I don't know-I tell you, something's going to happen to us! I feel it all—about us, everywhere. No, no, no! It's not the storm. It's something else-I don't know what." She was rapidly working herself into a state of hysteria, and Tommy did his best to quiet her, seeing that her nerves had quite gone to bits; but she would not be quieted. She turned, struggling in his arms, and she caught his head between her hands, holding his face close to hers.

"Whatever it is," she said wildly, "it sha'n't separate us! Promise me that it sha'n't separate us! We're as good as married, aren't we? Aren't we? They can't come between us now; nothing can, not God nor nothing! I tell you, I won't leave you! I'll come to you from anywhere! They can't make me stay away, not if they kill me, even. I'd come to you from the other side of all the hells there is!" She screamed again as the lightning flashed, burying her face upon his shoulder, and, just then, one of the horses stumbled over something in the road, and went down, and the other reared straight upward, and plunged and began to struggle, lashing out with its heels and squealing.

Jared leaped to the ground almost as soon as the horse fell, and Tommy, standing upright in the wagon, his arms about the shivering, sobbing girl, who crouched on the seat, heard him call from the darkness, in front:

"They's a rope! Look out! Look out!"

A yellow fire, which was not lightning, flashed from the thicket by the roadside, and it was followed by a roar which was not thunder. Something tore past Tommy's breast, just above the girl's head, snatching at his coat lapels. The wind of it spat sharply into his face.

"Get down!" cried Tommy, and strove to force the girl to her knees in the wagon-body. "Get down! They're shooting! Lie down, flat. Will you get down!" But she fought with him as she had fought that other night in the cabin on Half-Breed Hill, pulling herself up by her strong, young arms.

"I won't get down!" she gasped, struggling. "Let

me up! I want to be with you. Let me up."

The wagon lurched and jerked under them as the frightened horse plunged, kicking in his traces. Jared, hatless and swift, was reaching under the front seat for the gun he had laid there upon starting, and Tommy still fought and strove with the girl he was to marry, trying to force her down out of danger.

"I won't!" she cried fiercely. "I won't! Let me up!" She was, in her madness of excitement, almost as strong as he, and she shook herself free from him and threw her arms about his neck, holding him with a grip which he could not loosen. It seemed to him that they stood there, upright, for hours. He heard cries from the other women in the darkness behind. He heard a shout from the blond-bearded Patterson and the sound of running feet on the hard road. Patterson was coming to the rescue. He saw flashes of lightning which showed the long, white road and the still, black shapes of the trees beside and above it, and he saw strange little bursts of flame-little yellow flowers-in the gloom at either side, and heard cracking, whip-like reports. The other horse was down now and still, but the first one struggled as he lay, kicking and jerking the wagon about in tiny leaps and bounds.

"They'll kill us!" cried the girl, with her face cold against his. "They're hid in the brush. They'll kill us both, but we'll go together. They can't take me away from you. Can they? Can they? I'll never leave you, I swear it. I'll come to you wherever you are. I love you as much as—that! I'll never—never—Aah!" She whirled suddenly in his arms as if some one had laid a hand upon her shoulder and turned her about. Tommy's hand felt all at once hot and wet where it clasped her.

"You're hit!" he cried in a great voice. "My God,

you're hit! Where is it?"

Her face dropped against his throat, oddly weak and

limp.

"My—shoulder!" she whispered. "It's nothing, nothing! The same—shoulder that was—broke. Lay

me down—and—come with me. Maybe they—won't hit—you."

Tommy thrust the seat out of the way with his foot, and started to lay the girl flat in the wagon-body. He

was shaking and weak.

"They—can't separate us—nohow," she said again. "I'll come to you—wherever you are. Not even God couldn't——" She jerked in his arms again, as he bent with her, and her head fell back. Just then there came another flash of lightning, unbearably bright, and in its sudden glare Tommy saw the girl's face under his, eyes open, lips parted, green-white against the dark. Half-way between hair and brows a round black spot lay, and a stain spread from it.

Then I think the gloom turned to crimson about him, and he went quite mad—Berserk-mad, for Jared says that he stood upright a moment in the lurching wagon, shrieking horrible, blasphemous curses in a high, shrill voice, and then, brandishing a pistol brought out from Heaven knew where, sprang into the road, falling upon

one knee as he alighted.

It seems that the lightning was flashing almost continuously at that time, making the scene like day, and the first great drops of rain were beginning to pound upon the white dust. In the glare of the lightning, a man stepped into the road, some few yards ahead—a man still and grim, with a gun in his hands, half-raised. Jared says that, at the sight of this man, Tommy Carteret cried out hoarsely and ran forward, firing with the pistol as he ran. Jared himself and Patterson, the blond giant, fired at the same moment, and the man went down, but Tommy Carteret halted suddenly in his course and seemed to raise himself high on his tiptoes, arms upstretched oddly, as if he were reaching

for something. Then he whirled about once and fell face down in the dust, and lay still with the heavy rain beating upon his back as he lay.

It seems that after this there was no more firing from among the trees and underbrush; only a great silence that was broken by the downpour of the rain and an occasional rumble of thunder.

After a time a woman came stumbling slowly through the gloom. She carried a lantern which she had brought from the second wagon. She stopped beside the wagon, whose horses lay dead, and looked into it, holding the lantern high. Then, with a little dry sob, she turned and crept to the man who lay face down in the road, and knelt beside him, and laid her head upon his still body, and began to weep very bitterly.

Jared says that she spoke, as it were to the man who lay there, but he could hear her words only once:

"I told ye 'twould be so. I told ye they wasn't any

happiness in it!"

Then, presently, she called Jared to her aid, and they turned Tommy Carteret over on his back. One sleeve of his coat was torn near the shoulder where a bullet had pierced his arm. That need not be serious. Besides it, there seemed to be no body wound, but at one side of his head, just over the ear, a dark stain was spreading. It had marked the dust where he lay.

"Is he-daid?" said Jared, looking into the face of the woman who knelt across from him in the driving rain. The woman tore open the front of Tommy's shirt and laid her ear upon his breast. Then she dragged the lantern nearer and felt with her fingers at that wound over the ear.

"No," she said. "He ain't daid, thank Gawd. He's only stunted, but I reckon it's bad stunted. I reckon he mought die. Maybe his haid is broke open, thuh. I can't tell."

The rain beat in their faces and upon the face of the nan who lay between them, and, overhead, thunder rolled and muttered. The woman's eyes were haggard.

"What ye a-goin' to do 'ith him?" she asked after a

time.

Jared says that he shook his head. He did not know.

"Take him away!" she cried, half fiercely. "He oughtn't never to 'a' come hyuh. Look what it's done to him! Maybe it's—killed him. Take him away to the village. There'll be hell to pay fo' this night when it comes out to-morrow. Yo' mare ain't hurted. Take him into the cart an' drive to the village an' put him on that thuh midnight train, n'oth. They's doctors an' horspittals an' all, in Chicawgo. They'll save him ef anybody can."

Jared stared at her in the flickering lantern-light.

"I reckon," he said slowly. "I reckon that's the bes' thing 'at could be did. Hol' on! How 'bout Marianner?"

"She's daid," said the woman stolidly. "They managed fo' to kill her wen they was tryin' to kill him. She's daid an' I'm glad. She got him into this hyuh. He'd be—alive an' well ef it wasn't fo' her." Jared says that she seemed to feel no sorrow whatever over her sister's death, only bitterness and hatred, and he wondered why. It seemed to him rather horrible. But there were things that Jared did not know.

"I'll do it," he said. "I'll shorely do it. He mus' be got away befo' anybody fin's out about what's ben

done to-night. But I ain't got any money. How am

I a-goin' to git him to Chicawgo?"

"Go back to the cabin!" she said. "He mus' have money thuh. It ain't fur, an' you've got mo' time 'an you need. It ain't eight o'clock yet. Take him in the cart an' go back to the cabin. Then go to the village

an' get Winston to help you."

Jared says admiringly that this woman with her white, fierce face and her haggard eyes seemed inspired by the gods of wit and common sense. For himself, he acknowledges to a mind made blank as a child's by horror. He says that he called the blond giant Patterson to his aid—Patterson had gone up the little stretch of road to look at the fallen man who lay huddled there. It was Joe Borral. I find myself wishing it had been old Dave. And they brought the cart nearer (the mare was neighing shrilly with some vague sense of disaster, and pulling at her halter) and, between them, they lifted the heavy figure in its dishevelled evening dress and set it in the two-wheeled cart. Jared thinks that, just before they raised it, Rose Barrows, sobbing a little to herself, kissed the cold, drawn face, but that may be only an idea of his. I wonder. Then Jared mounted to his seat, and, with his arms about Tommy's body, drove away. As he passed the wagon, low, shivering, moaning cries came from it, and at first he thought that Mariana Canfield was not dead, only hurt and crying out; but Patterson came near just then, holding the lantern on high, and Jared saw that it was Mariana's mother, who had crept there through the gloom and rain, and crouched in the wagon-bed with the girl's head in her lap, swaying her withered body back and forth, keening her dead.

Of the rest of this night's work I can gather little,

in detail. Jared will not talk. His eyes fill with a sort of retrospective horror and dread when I press him, and he evades my questions. So you must picture to yourself that long, lonely drive through the night, the rain beating into Jared's face, the lightning flashing at intervals over his head, and the thunder rolling after it, the good mare stumbling in the mud, starting nervously at every flash from above, every thunder-clap. You must feel for yourself, as I sometimes feel, that terrible weight in Jared's arms which slips down, down, as his tired muscles relax their grip, and has to be heaved up again. Small wonder that he will not talk of it.

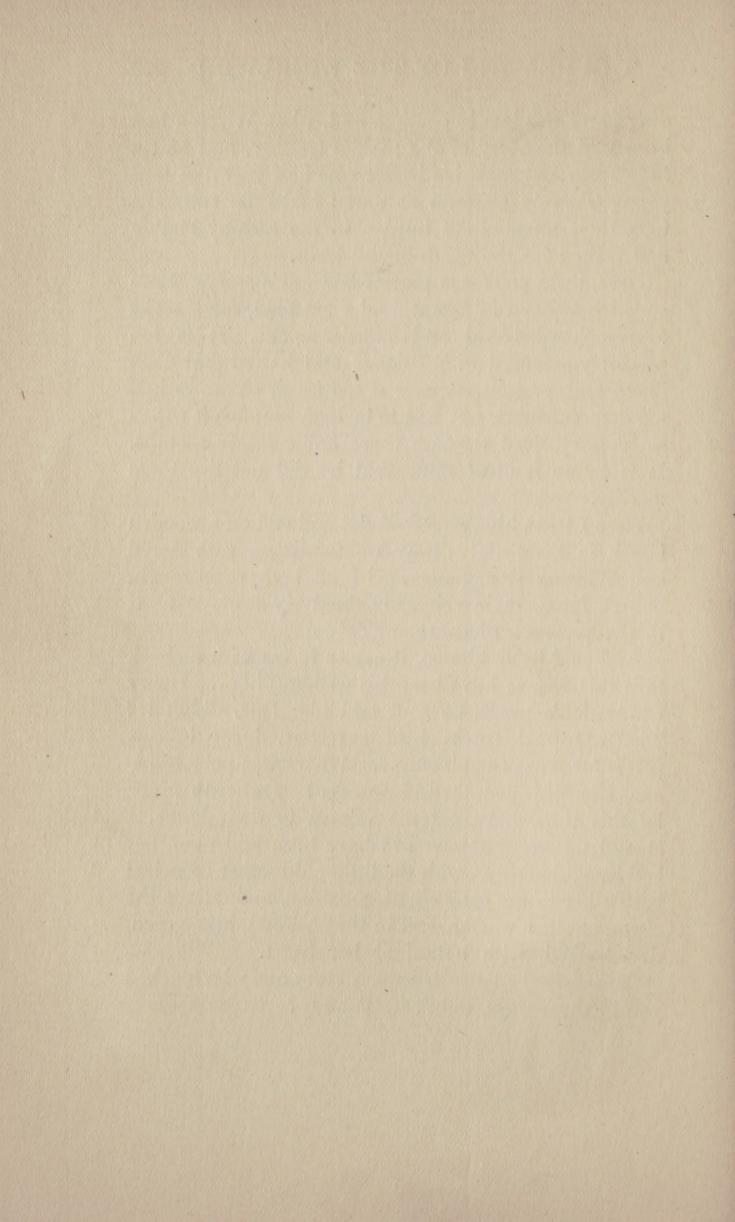
At the cabin on Half-Breed Hill, he knew what to do. Tommy had often showed him the strong box which held his ready money and such papers as were of importance. He had no key, of course, but there were other ways. He took an axe, he says, and broke open the box with that. Inside he found a roll of bills, three or four hundred dollars in all, and a small sheaf of legal-seeming documents bound together by an elastic band. These he put in his pocket and hurried out again to the cart and what crouched therein. Tommy was still alive, for his heart beat feebly, and somehow the conviction grew in Jared's mind—this much he will admit—that his master was not to die. Then there was the long drive-longer this time-to do all over again. He went by another road. It was less direct, but he had more time than he needed, and he says that he could not have driven through that wood-flat where a wagon stood with two dead horses before it, and a little distance away a dead man lay, face down in the mud, with the rain beating on him. In the village he found Winston, worried and anxious because the wedding party was late in coming, and, when Winston had been told the story of the night's tragedy, and had a little recovered from his horror—he had grown to love young Tommy Carteret as Jared had—the two men took their unconscious burden to the railway station and waited for the north-bound train.

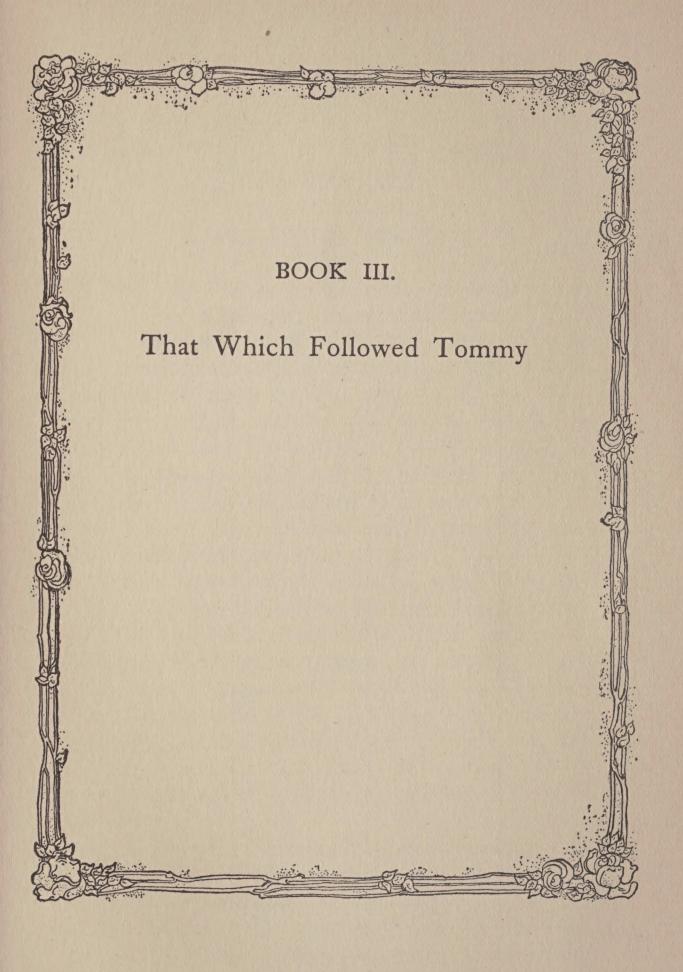
Here, then, ends this part of Tommy's story. Here ends his sojourn in Egypt, and I am glad, for it reeks overmuch of blood and powder-smoke. It is too sombrely coloured with despair and hatred and lone-liness and passion. There is too much gloom in it—too little sunshine. It had to be told, for such it was—so Tommy lived through those few summer months. It is by no fault of mine that he did not live more merrily.

Here I leave him, stretched flat and still on a wooden bench in the little railway waiting-room, with Jared and Winston sitting near, grief on both their rough, honest faces, their voices instinctively lowered as if in the presence of death.

And as I leave him so, it comes to me with a shock that this was to have been his wedding hour. Henry Carnardon's prophetic soul told him true, didn't it? The unturned leaves held surprises, indeed!—surprises for more than Tommy. Where was poor Mariana Canfield just then, I wonder? Patterson must, by this time, have got the women to their home, I should think. Mariana will have been laid upon her bed then, doubtless, with the little old mother crouched beside her in the candlelight, moaning, and, across the room, another woman, still in the shadows, bitter-eyed, dry-cheeked, with hatred at her heart.

Some strange curse fell upon every one who touched you in those days, didn't it, Tommy?







## CHAPTER XVI

## MARIANA KEEPS HER WORD

HE old Earl of Strope went up from Cannes to Geneva because he expected to meet his granddaughter Isabeau de Monsigny, of whom he was extraordinarily fond, and her husband Ashton Beresford, of whom he was only a little less fond. The three of them were to have gone on together to Paris. But upon his arrival at the "National" he found a message stating that the other two had been compelled by important affairs to go on that very day without him. The old gentleman's somewhat famously irascible temper was ill adapted to bear a shock, and this disappointment well-nigh wrecked it altogether. Further, his journey had been very disagreeable, and his luncheon uneatable. So it came about that when, at his solitary dinner that evening, he was given a bottle of Chambertin of surprising and uncalledfor vileness, he came to the maddened conclusion that this world had been designed and peopled with the sole aim of making him unhappy, and that he was sorry he had not died at the age usually allotted to that climax.

He cut short his dinner and, because the really good music of the hotel orchestra produced to his jaundiced soul only annoying discords, lighted a cigar and strolled out across the broad sheltered porch into the semi-gloom of the garden. It was a warm spring evening and the night air felt cool and grateful to him. He walked down one of the many little gravel paths, between borders of carefully trimmed box, knowing that at its end he would find a tiny, shrub-sheltered culde-sac with an iron tea-table and two or three comfortable cane seats. His eyes, still a bit dazzled by the bright lights of the dining-room, did not see that the retreat was already occupied, but as he moved toward one of the flexible arm-chairs of cane, and put out his hand to turn it to his satisfaction, a man's voice, high and sharp and nervous, called out suddenly from behind him, and to his left:

"I say, mind where you're going, will you! Are you blind? Don't you see that chair is occupied?" Of course the chair was quite empty, and the old Earl swung about irritably toward the speaker, working his heavy eyebrows up and down in the curious gorilla-fashion he had.

"What the devil do you mean?" he growled. "There is no one in that chair. Are you drunk?" But the other man had already risen from his seat and stood, swaying a bit in the half-light, his hands over his face.

"I beg your pardon!" he said in a queer, half-strangled tone. "I beg a thousand—pardons. Yes, I'm—drunk—mad—anything you like. I—please don't mind!" His hands dropped from his face, which seemed to be working uncontrollably, and the old Earl started forward with a sudden exclamation.

"Good God!" he said. "It's young Carteret! Carteret! What in Heaven's name is the matter with you, lad?" He laid his great hands on the younger man's shoulder and turned him into the light, which shone down the alley from the hotel porch.

"Lord-Strope!" said Tommy Carteret dully, and

without any great surprise.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the old gentleman, frowning down anxiously into the other's face. "Been dining too well—'not wisely but too well,' eh?"

"Oh, no!" said Tommy Carteret. "No, it's not that. I don't know. I fancy I'm mad, after a fashion. It doesn't matter much."

The Earl jerked his head toward the arm-chair.

"Thought somebody was sitting there?" he asked.

"There was a—woman there," said Tommy Carteret. "She's gone now. You ran into her." The elder man looked at him for a moment in thoughtful silence.

"Come up to the hotel!" he said presently. "It is a bit cool here to be sitting about. We will have something to drink sent up to my room, and make ourselves comfortable there. It is more than a year

since I have seen you."

Upstairs, in the big, bare sitting-room, he dropped his great frame into a stuffed chair and motioned the younger man to a seat opposite. A servant brought whiskey and ice and siphons of seltzer-water, and busied himself with filling the glasses, but the old gentleman did not speak. His keen eyes were upon Tommy Carteret's face. The gorilla eyebrows drew down again, and the square, white head shook strongly once or twice when he saw what a single year had done to this lad, how deeply and with what haggard lines it had marked his young face.

Then, when the servant had left the room, closing

the door gently after him, he spoke over his glass;

"Would you care to talk it over?"

Tommy Carteret made a little, weary, indifferent

gesture.

"It might be a certain relief," he said. "I rather think I should like it. At any rate, it would be a novelty. I seldom even speak to anybody, nowadays." And so, in that tired, indifferent voice of his, he went on to tell Lord Strope of what had occurred to him during the past year, of his being forced to leave his home in New York at the instance of an injured husband. He said nothing of his sacrifice, here, of his going into exile to save another man's honour, but he spoke of his life in that waste land of hills and bottoms and the trouble he had created there. He spoke—after a moment's hesitation—of Lord Henry Carnardon, and at that the old Earl sat forward with sudden exclamation, pressing him with questions.

"I knew that Henry was dead," said he. "The Duke wrote me that he was dead and that his servant had brought the body home for burial. Henry's elder brother Robert is the present Duke, you know. The old Duke died ten years ago. To think of your meeting poor Henry Carnardon in that hell yonder!

"Eh! Queer things happen. Poor old Harry! I was fond of him before he came his cropper with those Sicilian devils. Our mothers were sisters. I was fond of him. Get on with your tale, lad!" And Tommy went on to tell of the hatred and hostility he had so unwittingly inspired among those hill neighbours of his, and of Mariana Canfield, and of Henry Carnardon's advice, and of that last terrible night of storm and tragedy.

"They patched me up somehow, there in the Chicago hospital," he said. "And they said I was fit again, and

turned me out and told me to take a sea voyage to build

up my strength once more. I took it."

"Yes, yes!" said the old gentleman. "That's all very well, but"—he jerked his white head toward the open window—"how about the matter of that chair down there?"

"That comes later," said Tommy Carteret. He sat forward in his chair, frowning into Lord Strope's eyes, and, for the first time, a hint of feeling seemed to come into his voice, a certain earnestness which was

almost solemnity.

"Did I make it plain," he asked, "what she—what this girl said to me just before she was killed? She said, 'We're as good as married, aren't we? Aren't we?' She said, 'They can't come between us now, nothing can, not God nor nothing! I tell you I won't leave you! I'll come to you from anywhere. They can't make me stay away, not if they kill me, even. I'd come to you from the other side of all the hells there is!' Well, she came."

"What's that?" cried the old Earl sharply. "What

did you say?"

"I said she came," said Tommy Carteret. "She kept her word and came. I don't know how. I don't know, any more than you do, how she was able to cross the barrier, but she came. They couldn't keep her away, as she had said, not even by killing her."

The Earl sank back again in his chair and sat for a little while silent, staring thoughtfully across at the

younger man, under his great shaggy brows.

"Oh, yes," said Tommy Carteret. "I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that I am mad. Perhaps I am. I don't know. I seem to be perfectly sane on other matters, though."

The old gentleman shook his white head.

"No," said he. "I was not thinking that. You are not mad—in any common sense of the word, at least. But the thing is strange. Tell me more about it. When did this—this illusion—visitation—what

you will-first come to you, anyhow?"

"I don't quite know," said Tommy. "It was too slow of growth, I should think, to tell precisely. When I came out of the hospital, although they told me I was cured—and so I was as far as the bullet wounds were concerned—I went about in an odd sort of—of haze. Everything about me seemed feverish and unnatural and unreal. I had that last night with the lightning and thunder and the fighting and-and her face-the girl's face—as I saw it by a lightning flash just after she was killed, before my eyes constantly. I couldn't get rid of it. And I kept hearing her voice, too, night and day. It was-sufficiently horrible. So I went to Boston-I wouldn't risk New York, for fear of being seen by somebody who would know me-and there took ship for Naples. That was near the end of last September. I've been roaming about from one place to another ever since. Eight months it is, isn't it?-I think, I am not certain, but I think it was on shipboard that she-first began to-live and move and do independent things-independent of my will, you know. As I said before, I had the picture of her as she looked that last night, dead, always before my mind. Well, I expect I used to go off my head, over it, now and then. I was weak and nervous and all, you know. I expect I used to talk to it and-beg it to go away, probably. All that sort of thing. Anyhow, it grew less horrible, less vivid, and I began to see her more as she had been while alive. I began to live over those weeks when I had known her-I didn't want to, you know; it was no choice of mine. I couldn't help it. Then-I don't know when-she simply came to me. I don't think I was surprised, particularly. You see, I was living inside myself altogether. The things about me were no more real than the things in my head. She simply came to me, that's all. And she has been with me ever since. The—feverishness of the thing is quite gone, you know. I'm no longer haunted by dreams or imaginings or anything of the sort. I don't see the picture of that last night unless I deliberately call it up. Simply—the woman has come to me as she said she would. She's perfectly real—except to the touch. She goes everywhere with me. If she should come into this room now she would seem quite as actual flesh and blood as you seem-until I tried to touch her. She talks to me. She answers questions. She sees the things about her and comments upon them. She alters in appearance from time to time as any woman does. For example, she is quite a bit stouter than she used to be. She is the type which takes on weight rather early in life. She looks older by several years than before—before we came away from her home. She is beginning to resemble rather oddly an elder sister of hers whom I knew." He paused and looked up at the elder man with a little twitching, deprecatory smile—an appealing little smile.

"I dare say it all sounds frightful rot, to you," he said. "I dare say you want to laugh—I shouldn't blame you. Of course it's hardly a laughing matter to me."

But Lord Strope shook his head, frowning.

"I never felt less inclined to laughter," he said.

He made as if he would speak further, but shook his head once more and busied himself with choosing and lighting another of his great black cigars. Then, over the wreaths of smoke, he sat silent for a long time, watching young Tommy Carteret's worn, thin face.

"I am an old man," he began at last. "I am eighty-three years old, and I have seen and heard many odd things—very many, but I think I have never heard of anything quite so strange as this, nor so appalling—an illusion, a phantom which moves and talks and answers questions, which grows old as living things do! Good God! the thing is awful! It is beyond belief."

"Quite so!" said Tommy Carteret. "If a man had come to me a year ago and described such a thing I should probably have sympathised with him outwardly, and inwardly called him a liar. Nevertheless, it is true. It exists—whether in some crazed cell of my brain, or actually, objectively, I do not know. The woman has come back. She—I shall see her when I leave you here and go to my own rooms. She might even—come in here, looking for me. Sometimes she does that." His eyes shifted nervously to the door and back again, and he made a little uneasy movement in his chair. "Once," he said, "she came into a room where I was dining with some men-it was in Malta -and I-I made a fool of myself before them all. Of course they thought I was mad. It was very unpleasant."

"Ah!" said Lord Strope, nodding. He did not feel called upon to tell young Tommy that he had already heard of this occurrence from a British officer of Engineers—all but Tommy's name. "You say," he asked, "that you will find her in your quarters when you go there. Do you mean, then, that she lives—

that is to say, that she—she remains with you constantly?"

Tommy nodded, and a bit of colour came up over his cheeks, as it were from a certain embarrassment.

"She is under the impression," he said, "that we—we are married. That is, as she puts it, as good as married! She said that the night on which she was killed. She— It is impossible to go into details, really. It is very unpleasant."

The Earl said "Ah!" again in a deeper tone, and a certain pitying horror came over his grim face as he looked into the possibilities which Tommy Carteret slurred over with those reddened cheeks. Here was a man devil-ridden, indeed!

"But the doctor-men!" he said. "Surely you have had advice. Can they offer no explanation? Can they do nothing for you?"

"Nothing," said Tommy. "I went to Poresi in Rome. He is among the great, I believe—and he felt of the wound in my head and asked a thousand silly questions, and looked wise and said, 'Time and change of scene.' Time and change of scene, indeed! He wanted me to consult some man in Paris—some man with a Scotch name which I have forgotten—McPherson or McKenzie, or something of the sort."

The Earl nodded.

"Sir Gavin McKenzie," said he. "He is an old friend of mine. He is the foremost—alienist in Europe, I should think. I am going to Paris to-morrow. I wish you would come with me and see McKenzie. It may be of no use, but one cannot afford to miss a chance."

Tommy shook his head.

"I have no confidence in that sort of thing," said

he. "If ever I had, at first, I have lost it. If I could be persuaded, convinced that the thing is within me, that it is an obsession—illusion, I should do all in my power to seek a cure, but—one grows into queer beliefs, I expect, when circumstances are extraordinary enough. I have come to believe that the woman is really here among us—visible, of course, only to me. That may be a mad belief, but I cannot rid myself of it. I will go with you to Paris to-morrow, if you like, for I was thinking of going before I met you, but—I look forward to no relief from your McKenzie." He smoked for a little time in silence, then rose with a sigh.

"I'll go to my bed, I think," said he. "It is late. Doubtless you're fagged from your journey, too. I

mustn't keep you up."

If the Earl had seen his face just then I think he would have urged him to remain, for Tommy's face showed reluctance and dread as plainly as such may be shown, but the Earl was moodily staring across the

room under his grey brows, and did not notice.

"As you like," he said, when the other rose. "I shall be glad to have you for a travelling companion, anyhow. We'll talk about McKenzie another time. There must be some way out of this terrible state of yours, and if any one can find it McKenzie can. Good night! I—I am more sorry than I can say to find you hag-ridden in this fashion. I wish—— Ah, well, good night, lad! We'll talk it over again." And Tommy, after another moment of hesitation, went slowly out, and, with lagging, heavy steps, down the corridor to his own door.

He drew a little breath of relief as he turned on the electric lights in his room and found no one there, but the relief was short of life, for he heard the woman stirring about in the room beyond, and singing softly to herself a song he had come to hate—the little cheap song she had sung, under her breath, that evening when she sat at her doorstep as the sun was sinking beyond the Great Bottom and he had come upon her unawares. She often sang it now, possibly because she knew it

annoyed Tommy.

I fancy that if you could have gone into the room with Tommy this evening you would have seen, all in a moment, the whole pitiful horror of the life he led. You would have seen that first quick glance of his about the room as the lights flooded it, the subsequent breath of relief, the lowered eyebrows as he listened and heard something you could not hear, in the room beyond. You would have seen, in place of the elaborate and architectural structure common to Continental hotel bedrooms, a narrow little cot bed, very evidently set there by order, and you would have wondered about it until, all at once, the explanation would have burst upon you and you would have turned on poor Tommy a face of amazed pity. You would have seen him instinctively turn toward the closed door to the other room and make sure that the bolt was shot—as if bars or bolts could prevent that which waited on the other side from coming to him! And then, if you should wait long enough—but I doubt your courage to do it you would see something else, though you would see and hear only one side of it, Tommy's side, as one sees and hears only one side of a telephone conversation.

Tommy threw open one of the windows and stepped out into its tiny embrasure with his back to the lighted room. It was a still night, but a bit of cool breeze bore in from the lake, and he sniffed it gratefully. Down below him the gardens stretched black and silent. The

glow from the hotel porch fell upon the near-by shrubs and trees in odd spots of grey, and, to one side, a little yellow spark moved slowly up and down one of the paths. Some man was walking there with a lighted cigar between his lips. Out beyond, the broad quay was set with electric lights, and small groups of people passed, now and then, laughing and chattering. Once a woman's voice, a sweet, soft contralto, broke into a snatch of song—Gastaldon's "Musica Proïbita":

# ". . . Stringimi oh Cara, al tuo core! Fami provar l'ebbrezze dell' amor."

I fancy I see poor Tommy's lips twist into a wry smile. "L'ebbrezze dell' amor!" Would there ever be such for him? Small prospect of it, indeed! His eyes followed the red, port light of a little steamer which was creeping up the lake toward Lausanne, but he was thinking of his strange meeting with the old Earl, and of how much in keeping it was that the meeting should have taken place in just that theatrical manner. Any other man would have seen Lord Strope in the diningroom, quite in the ordinary fashion, or in the street, or would have learned from the hotel people that he was present, but Tommy's gods would not have it so. It seemed that their taste ran to melodrama. It was not altogether unnatural that their meeting should have turned his thoughts back to the old life, beyond this year of horror, and to his old friends. He thought of his father and of Arabella Crowley and, for a little mad moment or two, as long as he dared, of Sibyl, and he thought of Jimmy Rogers and Livingstone, andso he says-of me, and a great longing came over him to go home, a great engulfing wave of homesickness so strong that it brought tears to his long-dry eyesgripped him like a physical pain. It seemed to him, in that moment, that if he could only be at home again, among the good home things and the good familiar home people, this alien horror might slowly pale away. He could not imagine it existing there. I think that, for just an instant, he even felt a wild heart-throb of hope—though he had long since done with such—hope that there, in his home, he might be free once more—quite the old young Tommy who played with—Sibyl.

"I'll go!" he said to himself. And he beat his hands softly upon the iron rail of his tiny balcony. "By Jove, I'll go! I'll write to Aunt Arabella to-night and tell her to be looking out for me, and to the governor that I'm—— Ah, no! The governor's not there, is he?" He had been in occasional correspondence with old Arabella. She knew all about the end of his stay in Egypt land, and about his recovery from his injuries, and his subsequent wanderings, and she had told him that old Tommy, not long after John Hartwell's death, had set off, westward, for a tour of the world. "Running away from responsibility as usual," old Arabella had unkindly phrased it in her letter.

"I'll do it!" said young Tommy again as he turned back into the room. I'll go to Paris to-morrow, with Strope. Yes, I'll even see his doctor-man, to keep him quiet—but it'll be only en route to New York. Home!

Home, by Jove!"

There were writing-things on a table in the room—the usual glazed portfolio with a few sheets of hotel paper, no envelopes, a splay-pointed pen, and violet ink. Tommy dragged up a chair and wrote his letter to Arabella Crowley. It was a long letter and full of unwonted expressions of affection. I fancy it must hugely have pleased old Arabella. I know I was

pleased with the briefer note he wrote to me when he had finished the other.

"That's done!" he said at last, pushing back his chair. "Now for a night's sleep. That will be a long pull tomorrow, that journey to Paris——" And, just then, the locked and bolted door to the farther room opened slowly, despite lock and bolt, and Mariana Canfield stood in the opening, one hand on the knob. Tommy dropped back into his chair with a little gasping sob. It was a long, long fall from your new pinnacle of hope and eagerness, wasn't it, Tommy? And he seemed physically to shrink, to crumple, as it were, crouching there, looking up with eyes grown all at once sullen and bitter.

The woman was in a long robe de chambre, untidy and none too clean. Her hair was down in two great plaits which hung before her shoulders and reached nearly to her knees. She was handsome without doubt, but both her face and figure had already taken on too much weight and her face had coarsened. There were lines and contours in it, of temper and of ill nature and of other unpleasant things—lines that promised very ill for the future. A certain girlish sweetness which her face had borne at its best was wholly, irrevocably gone.

"Was you aiming—" she said, "didn't you want to come in to-night? I thought maybe as—maybe— It's right—lonesome." She smiled upon Tommy, a wheedling, pleading smile meant to allure, a smile that

was almost a leer.

The thing was horrible, but, more horrible still, it would seem that Tommy was used to it, for he only covered his eyes with his hands, crouching there in the chair, and said wearily:



"And, just then, the locked and bolted door to the farther room opened slowly, despite lock and bolt"

Burrend I led in head week to be at

"No. No, thank you. Good night! I—hope you'll sleep well."

And when the woman had gone, hesitating and looking back over her shoulder with that wheedling, pleading smile, he sat quite still—his hands over his face—for hour after hour, when he should have been in bed resting for that journey to Paris.

### CHAPTER XVII

## SIBYL BUCKLES ON HER ARMOUR

Coming out of the Long Sang Ti shop where I had been looking at a Buddha, which I could not afford, I saw old Arabella Crowley being sedately borne up the Avenue behind her ancient and sheep-like bays. I shouted and waved my stick at Jenkins, who affected not to see, but old Arabella put up her eye-glasses at me and poked the little footman in the small of the back with her parasol.

"How do you do, William?" she said to me, when I had made my way out to her. "You are such a noisy young man! One day you will be arrested for making a disturbance in the streets. What are you so excited

about?"

"I have news, Aunt Arabella!" said I importantly. "News you'll be glad to hear, by Jove!" Mrs. Crowley sniffed.

"If it's about Tommy Carteret," said she, "you may spare the trouble to tell it. I know a great deal more about it than you do. I should like to hear of Tommy's telling other people more than he would tell me. Fancy!—Get in! Get in! I want to talk to you. You are at times a very sensible young man." She poked the little footman once more with her weapon.

"Go out to the Park!" she said, "and drive about until I tell you to stop. And, for Heaven's sake, don't be run into by any of those wretched motor-cars."

The footman touched his hat, but Jenkins's high shoulders betrayed a whole octave of emotions from

injured pride to lofty and tolerant disdain.

"What do you know, William?" demanded old Arabella, when I had seated myself beside her in the victoria and the sheep-like bays had recommenced their somnole n amble.

"He's coming back!" said I enthusiastically. "Tommy's coming back! He wrote me from Geneva. He should be here in a week or two."

Mrs. Crowley allowed herself another disdainful sniff.

"I might have known," said she. "You are very behind-hand with your news. Tommy arrived in New York three days ago—on the very ship which brought his letters, indeed." I am afraid I shouted aloud here, for Jenkins's shoulders took on another inch in height, but Mrs. Crowley nodded sympathetically.

"Of course he would have let you know," she said handsomely, "you first of all, but he is very busy settling

himself in the Hall, and I fancy he hadn't time."

"Ah!" said I. "He's going out to the Baychester place? I had fancied he would come to Washington Square—for a time, at least."

"I fancy he couldn't—quite," said old Arabella. "I fancy it would have—have—well, brought things back

rather too much."

"Quite so!" said I. "I see, of course."

"I shall go out to my own place, there, at the end of this week," she said. "Tommy and I are neighbours, you know. I hadn't meant to go until next month, but—well——"

"Quite so!" said I again. "He'll need you, I'm

sure. Poor, old Tommy! Why, in Heaven's name, should all this have come to Tommy, anyhow? It's so beastly unfair! Why not to somebody who deserved it? It—it makes me go quite hot when I think of it, sometimes.

"I can't answer you that, William," said Mrs. Crowley, bowing to some woman who passed just then. "You'll have to inquire elsewhere. 'Sins of the father,' I expect. Old Tommy had his fun. He's had it for years and years. He was having it before you were born. And I expect some one had to pay. Of course"—she turned away a bit, and I may only have fancied that a tinge of colour came up over her cheeks-"of course the-the ones who-helped himwith his fun, you know, they had to pay, but probably that wasn't enough. So young Tommy had to pay the rest. No, it isn't fair; not as we see things, anyhow. You must come out to Red Rose and spend a fortnight with me. Tommy'll be glad of you, I know. Probably he wouldn't dare to ask you to come to him at the Hall. He has some silly notion that every one who is near him suffers from what he calls his curse. We must cure him of that idea, at least. Whether we shall be able to cure him of the other thing remains to be seen."

"It's very rum!" said I cautiously, "the other thing, you know. It's quite a new sort of thing, I gather—not a—a spook at all, just a commonplace every-day member of the household—changes its clothes—talks rationally—grows older—all that. No night-walking

spectre sort of person, at all!"

"It's a bit allegorical, isn't it?" said old Arabella, thoughtfully, "when you think the whole thing out." But this was a bit beyond me, and I didn't try to think it out. I thought of something else.

"You've seen him, then?" I asked.

"Oh, yes!" said Mrs. Crowley. "Yes, I've seen him several times."

"How does he look?" I demanded. "Is hechanged? Has it affected him outwardly?" But Mrs. Crowley, after she had opened her mouth once to speak, closed it again as if nothing she could say would be of any avail, and a sort of fear, I thought, came over her face—a sort of dread. Evidently poor Tommy was changed—more than I had supposed he would be.

"And that doctor-man?" I pressed her further, "that big alienist chap in Paris? McPherson! What did he say? Did Tommy consult him, as Lord Strope wanted him to do?"

"McKenzie!" said old Arabella. "Oh, yes, Tommy went to him. Of course, McKenzie wished time to study the case. It was hardly fair to burst upon him with a story of that sort and expect an intelligent answer all in a moment. But he looked at Tommy's head, and asked him curious questions about how it had felt when he first regained consciousness, and afterward, and all that. It was not so very different from what the Roman doctor had said—not until the last, anyhow."

"What do you mean?" I demanded. "Not until

what last?"

"Just as Tommy and Lord Strope were coming away," said Mrs. Crowley, "the doctor-man said: "'Your cure will come—if at all—through another

"Your cure will come—if at all—through another woman. I should advise you to fall in love.' Tommy laughed when he told me, but——"

I waited for her to finish her sentence, but she left it like that, and I did not press her. Old Arabella's ways are sometimes obscure. I changed the subject, quite.

"How is Sibyl in these days?" I asked. "One sees

so little of her nowadays!"

Mrs. Crowley turned to me with quite a jump.

"Upon my word, William!" she cried, peering at me through her raised eye-glasses, "upon my word, you are at times positively uncanny!" I do not know what she meant. As I have said, she was at times obscure.

"Sibyl has been very quiet for some months, hasn't she?" I went on. "I don't think it's right for that sort of girl to sit in her own shell and draw in her horns when people come near. She's a public loss—as

they say about the statesmen who die."

"That is very civil of you, William," said old Arabella, nodding. "Yes, Sibyl has been very quiet. I think," she said after a little pause, "I think I shall take her out to Red Rose with me next week." And at last I saw, and, I hope, blushed a bit for shame over my dulness.

"Do!" said I. "If anything can help poor old

Tommy, Sib can. I'm sure of that."

"You are at times a very sensible young man, William," said Mrs. Crowley again, and after that we talked about other matters: my Buddha, which I could not afford, and a new jade altar set which old Arabella had bought at some collector's auction sale, and, after an hour or two of this, Arabella set me down at the University Club, where I expected to find Jimmy Rogers, and went on her way.

She had meant to go home, I think, but, after a moment's hesitation, she changed her mind and went back up the Avenue, turning into one of the side streets among the Sixties. The butler said that Mrs. Eliot

was in the drawing-room with two or three callers. He thought that Miss Sibyl was upstairs. Arabella went into the drawing-room, where tea was being consumed and characters destroyed. She nodded to the callers, all of whom she knew, and asked them, in a perfunctory fashion, how they did. She kissed Mrs. Eliot, whom she disliked, on one ear, and refused tea.

"No, thank you," she said. "I won't sit down. I came to see Sibyl on business. I'll just go up to her if you don't mind. Will you have Morris bring me a cup of tea and some of those yellow cakes—the creamy ones? Thank you. Yes, it is a fine day, as days go. I have been driving in the Park with a young man. And now," she added to herself as she laboured up the stairs, "you may talk that over if you like."

They did.

She found Sibyl seated on the rug in the middle of her boudoir, flanked by a mountain of hats, which she was trying on with the aid of a long pier-glass. An emptied tea-cup and a plate of cakes stood near, and there was a box of Huyler's sweets within easy reach.

"Aunt Arabella, you're a dear!" said Sibyl. "I'll get up and kiss you in a moment. I think this blue one will do nicely. Aren't you glad you haven't red hair, Aunt Arabella? Think of the beautiful things I can't wear because of it. One day I shall dye it bright yellow, or else black. It's a great trial to me."

"If you're fishing," said Arabella Crowley, "you're losing time and wasting words. I was never known to say anything civil to any one. That blue hat is not bad, though. Buy it by all means. I like the goldenbrown one, too."

Sibyl rose from the rug and kissed her aunt with

some vehemence, for she was very fond of the grim old woman.

"You make out that you're a dreadful bear!" she said, laughing, "but you're not. You're a dear. What have you been doing with yourself? I haven't seen you for a week, nearly. Did you see mother as you came in?"

Old Arabella chuckled.

"I did," said she. "I went into the drawing-room for a moment to speak to her. Several women were there talking about another woman. They are now tearing me limb from limb because I said that I had been driving in the Park with a young man. We're all great cats, Sibyl, all we women. I could repeat almost word for word what those people down stairs are saying about me just now."

Sibyl rang for her maid to take away the hats, and at that moment the butler came in with Mrs.

Crowley's tea.

"Sib," said old Arabella when the man had gone, "I want you to come out to Red Rose with me next week." The girl turned back from the window, where she had been standing, with an exclamation of surprise.

"Next week?" she said. "Are you going to open Red Rose next week? I thought you meant not to

go out until July."

"I've changed my mind," said old Arabella. "That's a privilege I occasionally claim. Will you come?" she asked.

"Why—yes," said Sibyl slowly. "Yes, of course. I had made a few engagements for the latter part of the week, but they're of no importance. Yes, I'll come if you want me, Aunt Arabella."

"Of course it will be dull," said Mrs. Crowley.



"She found Sibyl seated on the rug in the middle of her boudoir, flanked by a mountain of hats"

the total training the ministry for preside

"There won't be any gaiety, but if you want that you can come in town occasionally." But the girl looked up with a little faint, tired smile and shook her head.

"I don't demand gaiety," said she. "I haven't been very gay myself, of late, have I?" She went to the window again and stood looking out into the street and over the near-by Avenue to the green trees of the Park beyond.

"I think I shall like it in the country," she said.

"The early roses will be out, won't they, and the larkspurs and pinks, and the wistaria and all? Yes, I think I shall like it. I'm—tired of town. Somehow it—seems not to amuse me very much, this year."

Then old Arabella took a quick breath, as it were of courage and resolution. "Of course," said she, "we sha'n't be quite alone. I shall ask two or three people—whomever you like, and—and there will be Tommy, at the Hall." She tried to go on talking in an even, calm tone, but the words would not come. Her lips faltered and shook a bit and she stopped.

Sibyl turned very slowly away from the window, with her hands half raised to her breast, and her face had gone perfectly white. It came to Mrs. Crowley swiftly that she had once seen a woman in a play do just that—turn very slowly about with half-raised arms and just such a white stricken face, but she was fiercely berating herself, within, for her stupidity in breaking the thing to Sibyl in this abrupt fashion, and she had no time for dramatic recollections. Indeed, in the midst of her self-anger, she was conscious of a very considerable surprise. It seemed that she had much underrated Sib's interest in the lad. She had expected some astonishment, and perhaps a few blushes, but not this.

"Do you—mean," said the girl in a sort of whisper, and her hands were at her breast now, and her eyes burning into old Arabella's eyes, "do you mean that—Tommy, young Tommy has come—back? Do you mean that he's at the Hall?"

"Yes, Sib," said Mrs. Crowley soberly. "Yes, he has come back. Ah, child, child, come here to me! I didn't know. Truly I didn't know. It was brutal of me. If I'd-known, I'd have told you differently. I'm sorry." Sibyl took a little faltering step toward her aunt, and another, then she ran, and dropped upon her knees and laid her head in old Arabella's lap, and began to weep with great sobs. And old Arabella wept a bit too, stroking the girl's hair and laying her withered cheek upon it, and murmuring words that were meant to soothe and comfort. "I am a stupid old fool, dear child!" she said, growing angry with herself all over again. "I haven't the eyes of a bat. I don't deserve to be called a woman at all." And that was the best thing she could have said, for Sibyl sat up on her knees, indignant through tears, and raged at her aunt for daring to make such statements about herself. All of which were cruel and false, etc.

"But you might have told me before," she reproached, coming back to her own troubles. "Tommy here! Tommy! and—and I didn't even know. How is he, Aunt Arabella? How does he look? Has he—changed terribly? Did they quite—quite cure him of his wounds at that dreadful hospital? Is he just the same Tommy he used to be? Ah, no, he'll never be that again, I suppose. Tell me, dearest! Why don't you tell me? Don't you see how I'm aching to know? Can't you put yourself in my place? Why, it's Tommy! my Tommy!"

So then old Arabella Crowley set out, as gently as she might, to tell the girl of this new Tommy who had crept back to his home, hoping and despairing of hope that home would take his curse from him. She told her of that which followed Tommy, and winced as the girl's shoulder shook under her arm. And when she had quite finished, the girl raised her head, kneeling still beside the elder woman's chair, and she stared for a long time out across the room to the window where the white curtains swayed in the breeze. There was pain in her face, and horror, too, a little, and great sorrow, but, as she sat there, the shock and bitterness and dread seemed to go, leaving in their place a certain firmness, a certain sweet determination that old Arabella had never before seen in her. Something new had come into Sibyl's face, something new and lovely and very good to see—the latent maternal, perhaps, the womanly longing to soothe and protect and comfort. Whatever it was, it was lovely and very good to see.

"We'll save him, Aunt Arabella," she said. "Oh, I'm glad he came home! It's our part now to help him, ours, who—love him. We'll save him, I'm certain of it, perfectly certain, somehow. Ah, I'm glad

Tommy has come home!"

Then presently, as the two sat talking, Sibyl's mother, her callers having gone, came in upon them. She was a trivial woman with a weak mouth—a negative type of woman. She and her daughter were almost strangers.

"Ah, here you are, Arabella!" she said. "I hoped you had not gone. You and Sibyl having a confer-

ence?"

"I have been asking Sibyl to come out and help me

open Red Rose next week," said Arabella Crowley—"if you can spare her, that is. Of course I should have asked you too, Constance, but I know you would be bored. It will be dull beyond description."

Mrs. Eliot murmured something vaguely polite, but

there was obvious relief in her tone.

"—If it weren't for engagements, dear Arabella," she finished. "Of course one has one's duties. I'm sure dear Sibyl will enjoy being with you. Sometimes, do you know, I feel that you and Sibyl are almost closer friends than she and I are. Sometimes I almost feel jealous of you."

Old Arabella made a sound in her throat. She sometimes found Constance Eliot hard to bear, and she was neither a tolerant nor a very civil old woman.

"I dare say we shall manage, Sib and I," she said. "I shall keep her with me as long as I can, so don't look for her immediately." But within, she was saying, angrily, "Almost closer friends, indeed! You don't know one side of Sibyl. You're not woman enough. Almost closer friends! Upon my word, I don't understand how you could have mothered her. It's absurd!"

"Ah, now," said Mrs. Eliot in her high, thin voice, "that will be very convenient, for I was wanting to go to the Blackwells', on St. Regis, for a fortnight, but I didn't wish to leave Sibyl alone. Now I shall be able to go. Ah, dear Arabella! you don't know what it is to be left a widow with a child to care for. One must never think of one's self."

I think old Arabella came as near to cursing, inwardly, as a woman may. Outwardly, she only sniffed.

"It has not worn upon you, Constance," she observed. "It might have killed some women." Mrs.

Eliot looked at her sister-in-law sharply, as if she suspected a hidden sting, but she was hopelessly outclassed by old Arabella, and, in a vague way, knew it. She retreated now in what she considered good order.

"Yes," she said, "you were fortunate—in a way, of course—to have had no children. Dear Sibyl has been all to you that a daughter could be with none of the responsibility. Ah, well, I must be dressing. I have to dine with the Bishop to-night. Good bye, Arabella! So sweet of you to have dear Sibyl at Red Rose! Good bye!"

Arabella Crowley's lips moved wickedly as the other woman left the room, but she only shook her head and sighed. Sibyl had gone over to the window again, as her mother came in, and stood there beating gently upon the glass with her finger-tips and staring out toward the green trees of the Park.

"When do we start, Aunt, dearest?" she said, as old Arabella approached her. "Monday?—And this is only Friday?—Three whole days that poor Tommy is waiting and suffering and needing—us, and we not there!—Dear Tommy!—Aunt Arabella, tell me something truly, truly! Have I—am I—do you think I'm—less—pretty or attractive or anything, than I used to be, a year ago? Do you think he'll think so'? Do you think he'll remember that he—liked me on that last night, the night of the Devereuxs' ball? Do you?—Oh, we shall save him, Aunt Arabella! I know we shall. Could any one—love Tommy as dearly as—we do, and not be strong to help him? No, no! We'll save him. And then—maybe—Oh, Aunt Arabella, who can tell? Maybe—maybe—"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### IN THE ROSE-GARDENS

I DID not go to Red Rose. Tommy wanted me with him at the Hall. I found a letter awaiting me at my chambers when I went home from that drive in the Park with Arabella Crowley. It seemed good to see

Tommy's ugly, scrawling hand again.

"—I'd have come personally to ask you, Bill," he said, "but I'm very hard-driven with getting the Hall into habitable condition, and besides, you know, you're never by any chance at home. It's labour wasted to go to your diggings. Come on Monday, there's a good chap! Chuck up everything else. I really need you—but, look here, Bill! If your nerves aren't good, don't come. I'm apt to get on them frightfully if they're tender. I'm not at all a cheerful beggar to be shut up with. Still, I need you. Come, if you think you can stand it. I'm asking Jimmy Rogers, too." Jimmy Rogers, too! Where was Arabella Crowley's house-party to come from? She had meant to have Jimmy at Red Rose.

Of course I replied that I would come. My nerves are good, and Tommy said he needed me—good old Tommy! And, besides, a man has his curiosity. I wanted to know more about this thing which had come to Tommy—study it at close range. It promised interest, I said to myself.

I went out on Monday morning—I and my bags and

boxes—in a motor. Tommy had been expecting me to come by train, and was not in the house to welcome me. Parkins was, however, and unbent the least bit in the world to say that Mr. Thomas would be glad of my arrival. It appeared that Mr. Thomas had gone down, a half-hour since, to the cove where the boats were kept.

It was ignoble of me, but a man has his curiosity—I lowered myself to a discreet questioning of Parkins. I did it, I believe, in the guise of family friend, Parkins enacting the rôle of faithful retainer. How did he find young Mr. Thomas? One heard rumours. Parkins sighed and rolled his eyes. He made a deprecatory little gesture with his two hands. Altogether, it was

quite like a bishop engaged in confirmation.

One heard rumours, I persisted, of—should one say hallucination? Too bad, too bad in a lad so young! One supposed he was never, well—violent, out of his head? No? Oh, decidedly not, said the faithful Parkins's gestures. He hadn't by any chance become addicted to—drugs, things to make one sleep, to soothe one's pain? This, I fancy, was what I had been after. The notion had occurred to me that Tommy might, in those months of exile, have taken to something of this sort, and so brought on the present trouble. It was not an untenable hypothesis. But Parkins rejected it with horror.

"Oh, no, sir! Nothing of the sort, sir, I do assure you!" he declared. "I should know it if he took drugs. He couldn't conceal it from me, sir. I am in his room as much as his valet. Beg pardon, sir, I'll just see that that man makes you comfortable. Will you go up now or will you go down to Mr. Thomas, sir?"

"I'll go down to the shore, I think," said I. "Thank

you, Parkins. I daresay we shall have Mr. Thomas

right in a short time."

"Yes, sir," said Parkins. "Thank you, sir." And I went down, across the gardens and the broad stretch of turf beyond, to the little cove, where I found Tommy, in grey flannels and a panama hat, throwing sticks into the water for the amusement of an Irish pup. He heard me coming, and sprang up the bank with a welcoming shout.

"By Jove, Bill!" he cried, pumping at my hands, "it's good to see you again! You grow uglier month by month, but you're an archangel to come out here

into the wilderness to cheer me up."

"You're no such blanked beauty yourself!" said I, grinning upon him affectionately, "but I'd rather see you than a heap of other people. You're a fraud, Tommy! You're a fakir! You look as fit as I do." Indeed, any surprise I may have felt was at his perfectly natural appearance. I had dreaded meeting him, for I had expected a gaunt and haunted wreck of a man-I saw it, later, though not in the extreme I had feared, for I found that there were two Tommys-one who, by some Herculean effort, thrust his troubles from him, for hours together, and harked back to boyhood; the other a hag-ridden man, hollow of eye, stern of jaw, fresh from some new scene with that which he alone saw and heard. I learned that the two Tommys could change places in an hour - nay, sometimes in a moment, for, once or twice, I saw the thing done, and I shall never forget.

"Jimmy Rogers turned up yet?" I asked.

"No," said Tommy. "Unless Jimmy has changed his spots, he will turn up not when he is expected, but at some other quite different time, and that time only God and Jimmy can place. There are a great many irresponsible people about, but Jimmy Rogers is in a class of his own—hors concours. Oh, did old Parky show you your quarters?"

"No," said I. "I came straight down here. Come along and show me them yourself. You shall sit on the edge of my bed while I show you our latest novelties

in shirts."

"Right, oh!" said Tommy, but halted abruptly,

and I saw a little swift pallor cross his face.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "What's the good? You're so jolly active, Bill! Wait until luncheon time. There's no hurry."

"No, there's no hurry!" I agreed, watching his face. Poor old Tommy! afraid of his own house! Afraid of what lurked, hiding, there, ready to fasten upon him as he came near.

"It's not bad, down here, you know," he said, as if he felt that apology was necessary. "Look at that hazy light out over the Sound! The water's pure silver."

"Quite so!" said I. "Arabella Crowley come out

to Red Rose yet?"

"A couple of hours ago," said Tommy. "She came—they came—in a motor, Sib and Aunt Arabella." Was there a quick flush on Tommy's cheeks? "I saw them as they passed that bend in the road beyond my greenhouses. They were all covered up by veils and things, but I'd know—Sib anywhere, in anything. Green, it was!" he said, obscurely. I take it he meant Sibyl's motoring veil. "I say, Bill!" He turned, lying on his elbows, and looked at me.

"Say it!" said I.

"I say, you know," said Tommy. "Have you seen

much of her this winter—this past year? Is she just as—just as—just like—always, you know? Is she as—pretty and—beautiful and all that, you know—and sweet, you know?"

"Aunt Arabella?" said I. I think Tommy was on the point of being rude about Arabella, but he checked

himself.

"I meant Sibyl," he said.

"Sibyl's been rather quiet this year, Tommy," said I. "She's been rather a hermit. None of us has seen much of her."

"Aah!" said Tommy, slowly. "Has she, though?" he said, and fell into a little fit of silence, looking out over the Sound.

"I'm sorry for that," he said after a long time. It was as if he spoke to himself. "I'm—sorry. It sounds as if she hadn't been happy. I—shouldn't like to think of Sib—unhappy. Good God, no! I'd—why, I'd——" He halted in the middle of his sentence, and again fell silent, and there was nothing more to be had out of him that morning.

We lunched in a certain little open, rustic pavilion, which stands on a knoll above the cove where the boats lie. Jimmy Rogers had not turned up, and the table was set for two. It was during this luncheon and for the hour or so thereafter that Tommy told me much of what had taken place in that exile of his, and of the strange things which had occurred since. He went into detail over it—indeed, I think it was a sort of relief to him to talk. He had been so long alone. Such horrors had been shut up within him. It is from what he told me on this day, supplemented by two or three long talks afterward, and by such evidence as I have

got from half a dozen other people, that I have been

able to put together his story.

"And I'm telling you all this, Bill," he concluded, "because—well, partly because I think it's a relief to have it out, but chiefly because I want you to understand when you see me—as you will, from time to time—acting like a bally madman. I want you to understand what I've been through and how the thing has grown to be what it is now. You'll see me do some very odd things, and, sometimes, I sha'n't be fit to speak to. Just—think it over a bit when you're on the point of chucking me altogether, and you'll make allowance."

"No danger of my chucking you, Tommy," said I.

But Tommy shook his head.

"You haven't had a chance yet," said he. "Wait a bit."

Then we lighted our pipes and set out for a stroll about the place. The Hall has plenty of land about it—gardens and lawns and orchards, and an acre or two of untouched wood. The house itself faces the Sound, with a hundred yards of green lawn sloping down to the water's edge, but eastward the rosegardens, hedged and stone-walled against the wind, stretch across to the boundary where old Arabella Crowley's Red Rose property begins.

"I expect we ought to go over and pay our respects to Aunt Arabella," I said, as we tramped along a gravel

path between the rows of early roses.

"Ye-es!" said Tommy, slowly. "Yes, I—we'll go over this evening, when Jimmy comes, if he ever does. No hurry, you know." I must have stared at him a bit, for he turned away with some show of embarrassment and began pulling a rose-bush about. It did not occur to me until afterward that he might be, in a way,

dreading his first meeting with Sibyl. His parting with her on that night at the Devereuxs' ball, a year ago, must have been vivid in his mind, and, with it the miserable sense of their altered footing now. Yes, I understood well enough, afterward, but at the mo-

ment I was puzzled.

I did not notice that, in his wholly unnecessary attention to the rose-bush, he had dropped behind, until I turned the corner into another little alley, sweet and fragrant like the first, and found that I was alone. I was on the point of going back, or of calling out to him, when I caught sight of old Arabella Crowley and Sibyl Eliot approaching down my path. Then, I am proud to state, I acted with almost human tact. I hurried on to meet them, and had my greetings over before they could ask about Tommy.

"There's a new cat-boat down in the cove," said I. "Don't you want to come and see it? It looks a very proper boat—as cat-boats go." Then I pretended to

bethink myself.

"Oh—Tommy's just back there, among the roses," I said. "Have you seen him yet, Sib? Catch him up and bring him along. Aunt Arabella and I will go on ahead."

"Ye-es, oh, yes!" said Sibyl, slowly, very much as Tommy had said it. "Yes, very well. Just down this path, is he?" She hesitated a moment, but I took old Arabella firmly by the arm and led her away.

"Just down that path to the left!" I called back to

Sibyl.

"You have your moments, William," said old Arabella, patting my hand. "You have your moments."

Now Tommy, having made a mess of the rose-bush, and discovering, all at once, that he had been left alone,

sang out my name and started to catch me up, but, as he started, one appeared at the end of his little alley whom he had not expected—one in white with the afternoon sun upon her hair and face.

"Sib! Sib!" cried Tommy, in a great voice, and made as if he would run to her, but instead he drew back, shaking, and his hands went up over his face.

"Unclean, Sib!" he said in a sort of groan. "Unclean! Unclean!" as lepers used to say. But, since he would not go to her, Sibyl ran to him, and caught his hands away from his face, and held them fast in hers, against her breast, and she cried out upon him fiercely.

"Oh, Tommy!" she cried, "how dare you? How dare you? Ah, no, Tommy! No!" And she began a little, queer, sobbing laugh, staring up into his face.

"Oh, Sib!" said poor Tommy, shaking before her, "I'm cursed, hag-ridden, mad—or something worse. I mustn't touch you, Sib, for every one I touch is cursed along with me, horribly. Not you, too, Sib! Not

you, too! I couldn't bear that."

"Oh, hush, Tommy, dear!" said Sibyl, holding his hands fast in hers. "You mustn't say such things or I shall think you're mad. Listen, Tommy! You did a fine thing a year ago—oh, a splendidly fine thing!—I wonder if you ever knew how splendid I thought that was of you—and, because of it, you've suffered more dreadfully than any man I ever knew or heard of, but you're not going to suffer any more. I'm going to—we're going to have you your old self again shortly. Why, that's what we're for! You've come back to us, dear Tommy, and we're going to cure you of this—this thing that's making you suffer. Come and talk to me somewhere. Is there a seat in

your rose-garden? Bill and Aunt Arabella have gone down to look at the cat-boat. Is there a cat-boat, Tommy, or was that just a nice lie of Bill's? Bill is a dear—sort of—but not so dear as you. Take me somewhere where we can talk."

Now, at the northern end of the rose-garden there is a high brick wall, grown over with ivy, and against this wall stone benches are set at intervals. They are overgrown with ivy, too, but that makes them the more comfortable. Tommy Carteret led Sibyl to one of these, and they sat down there together. It was shady and still and very odorous of the roses. A bee droned past them from time to time, a crow called monotonously from a field somewhere out of sight, and down in the greenhouses at the foot of the garden some one was hammering, driving nails. It was oddly like the sound of a horse's shod hoofs trotting over asphalt.

"Shut your eyes, Tommy!" said Sibyl. "Of what does the scent of those roses remind you—the roses and I, and that hammering like a horse's hoofs?"

"The Devereuxs' roof-garden, a year ago," said Tommy. "Oh, Sib, I'd rather not have remembered

—as if I didn't always remember!"

"Do you, Tommy?" she asked gently, and leaned her head back against the ivied wall, closing her eyes. "Do you truly? Why, so do I! I've never forgotten, either. We were so—pleased with each other, that night, weren't we? It—wasn't quite the sort of thing we'd felt before. It was something a bit—new."

"Yes, yes," said Tommy Carteret; "I went home in a sort of whirl, as if I were drunk. I walked all the way down to Washington Square, and I'm not a bit certain that I didn't shout and sing. I was to have—to have come to you the next day."

"Yes!" said Sibyl, under her breath, and her lips

trembled, if Tommy had but looked at them.

"Oh, Sib!" he cried, very bitterly, "I've come to you at last, but look at me! Look at me!" And Sibyl moved closer to him on the stone bench, catching his hands in hers with a little low cry of sympathy and tenderness.

"Yes, Tommy, dear!" said she. "I know, I know. You're not the same Tommy who went away from me that night with promises to come the next day. That was a lad—ah, but a sweet lad, Tommy!—a lad to love! You're not that lad, now; you're a man that's known pain and bitterness and solitude and despair greater than I can even imagine. I know, I know."

"And therefore, Sib," said he, "avoid me! I beg you, avoid me. Shun me as you'd shun disease, for I bring sorrow wherever I go. I blight, Sibyl! I cast a shadow that never lifts. Shun me if you'd save your

happiness."

"You hurt me, Tommy, dear," said she. "Those things aren't true; but if they were, if they were a thousand times more dreadful than you say, I should risk them if I thought I could help. What am I for, Tommy, but to help?"

"For everything else that's beautiful!" cried Tommy Carteret, and hid his face with his hands. "To be loved, Sib, worshipped, cared for, set on high, shel-

tered from every evil!"

"Now," said she, with a little low laugh—
"now, Tommy, you make me believe that there's lad
in you still. Do you know no more of women than
that? A woman doesn't want to be worshipped and

set on high. Didn't you know? It's so lonely and uncomfortable away up there! She wants to be held close, Tommy-kissed and comforted like a woman, not a goddess. But oh, more than anything else, she wants to comfort—I thought you knew that—she wants to soothe and help and mother. If there are wounds, she wants to bind them. It's so much better than sitting above an altar!"

Tommy's voice shook.

"You're sweeter," he said, "dearer, lovelier than I knew any woman might be. You're beyond any words, Sibyl. Words are so poor and cheap! They seem to me, just now, very silly things, with no strength or meaning. That's because I need them so. Oh, Sibyl, you're—I cannot say what you are. But you don't understand."

"Oh, yes, Tommy, dear!" said she. "I understand everything. If I didn't, do you think I'd-I'd speak as I have spoken? I'm not such a dreadfully forward young person as all that!"

But Tommy stared into her eyes.

"You-know," he said in a half-whisper, "whatwhat haunts me? You know that I-that I'm followed wherever I go?"

"Yes," said Sibyl, "yes, I know. We'll save you from—it, yet, Tommy, I know we shall."

Then for a little time they were silent, looking into each other's eyes; Tommy, I know, thinking how lovely she was, how unspeakably exquisite; and Sib, I fancy, mourning over Tommy's thin cheeks and tragic eyes and those lines which made his mouth so bitter in expression. No, this wasn't the Tommy who had said good night to her at the Devereuxs' dance. What was it he had said at the very last?

And as if her thoughts called to him aloud, he cried to her again:

"Oh, Sib, Sib! You're so very beautiful!"

Sibyl clasped her hands together with a swift little breath of delight.

"You remember?" said she. "You remember, Tommy?"

"How should I forget?" he demanded. "Have you grown less beautiful? No, more, Sib, more! How should I forget?"

"Will you tell me something?" she asked, as if a thought had come to her suddenly. "What did you do with the picture I sent—Aunt Arabella sent to you down in that—dreadful place?"

"I put it in a frame," said he, "a frame made like a Japanese temple gate. And I hung it on the wall over a table where I sat to write or read. I think I prayed to it. Then—after a long time—I tore it up when something had—when I dared not see it there any longer. It was rather like murder, tearing it so, but I had to do it."

The shade had come over his face again, and once more he sat silent for a little space, staring beyond her, out over the garden, with gloomy, bitter eyes. The girl could have wept over him but that there are no tears for such depths as this. Tears are for lighter woes.

But presently, as she sat watching his face, she saw his eyes all at once sharpen and focus themselves as upon some one entering the gardens from the side nearest the house, and move slowly, as if following the newcomer's approach.

"Aunt Arabella and Bill coming?" she asked, and turned her head with a smile to look. There was no one in sight, and she looked back at Tommy with a puzzled frown. Clearly he was watching some one—some one who moved. Then in another instant she understood and cried out sharply:

"Tommy!" moving closer to him on the stone bench, and catching at his arm with her two

hands.

"You—frighten me, Tommy!" she cried. "Please, please! I—think I'm afraid. Please, Tommy, don't —look so!"

Tommy turned to her with a start, and saw that she was trembling and that the colour had left her cheeks. "It's nothing, Sib!" said he. "Don't be-frightened. It's-nothing at all. Will you let me go down the path a little way, for a moment? I shall be back at once." She caught at his arm again with a cry, as he rose, but he went quickly down the garden-path until he was almost out of earshot, and halted there with his back to her. She was shaking still in that instinctive panic one feels before anything supernatural, and she covered her eyes with her hands, but uncovered them almost at once. Tommy was speaking to empty air in a low, angry voice and with quick, vigorous nods of his head. She heard him pause once or twice, as if that space to which he spoke had spoken in return, and once she saw, in the clear, bright sunlight, a sudden flush spread over his cheeks and subside again. Then he ceased speaking, and she saw him watch that thing of invisible air move away—saw his head turn as he watched it go along the path to the house. Presently he wheeled once more and returned to the old stone bench.

Sibyl dropped her face into her hands and fell into a fit of nervous sobbing.

"You see, Sib!" said Tommy Carteret in his tired, bitter voice—"you see! Avoid me, Sibyl! Shun me as you'd shun disease. I cast a shadow that never lifts. Shun me if you'd save your happiness!"

But that brought her head up in an instant, and she

caught him by the shoulders with her two hands.

"Never, Tommy!" she cried. "Never! God knows if there be happiness in it or sorrow, but I'll never give you up. Oh, Tommy, there shall be happiness! We'll save you yet. I promise you! I promise you! There shall be happiness."

#### CHAPTER XIX

## THOSE MOVING EYES OF TOMMY'S

ARABELLA CROWLEY asked us to dine at Red Rose

that evening, but Tommy declined.

"Jimmy Rogers may turn up at any hour," he said. "Let us come to-morrow or some other day." And Jimmy did turn up, just as Tommy and I were thinking of going in to dress for dinner. He arrived in a large, angry, red motor-car with Gerald Livingstone's bulldog, Marcus Aurelius, on the seat beside him, barking defiance to all the world. There was also a chauffeur buried under luggage in the rear, but Jimmy Rogers explained that the chauffeur was only for the look of the thing, and that Marcus Aurelius was to drive the motor back to town.

"Jerry will be so pleased," he said, "to find that the dog can be useful; save him no end of money. I've taught him a heap of things since Jerry's been away. He can drink beer now and almost smoke a pipe, and he sleeps in Jerry's blue silk pajamas every night. Fine dog, what? You don't happen to have a cat about, do you? He has worked up an appetite on the way down."

Tommy laughed, and it was more like his old laugh

than anything I had yet heard from him.

"By Jove, Jimmy!" said he, "this is like old days. You don't change, do you? Are you ever going to grow up?"

Jimmy Rogers turned a gloomy and affronted countenance to Marcus Aurelius.

"You see," he said, "he thinks I'm funny. Everybody thinks I'm funny. No one ever took me seriously in all my life. Ah, well, just you wait! You wait till he sees you driving this motor-car. Then, maybe, he'll begin to appreciate the fact that I am a gentleman of parts. You may now go, Marcus. This person has no cats for you—I see it in his face."

Marcus Aurelius took the steering-wheel firmly in his teeth, and, with more aid from the chauffeur than most gentlemen are willing to accept, drove the car out into the road and disappeared. We presently heard him barking joyously from a cloud of dust, and decided that the chauffeur was now doing it all, though Jimmy Rogers stoutly insisted that the dog could both

bark and steer at one and the same time.

"Which is a jolly lot more than either of you can do!" he said crushingly.

An hour later, when we sat down for dinner, Jimmy Rogers noticed that there was a fourth chair, placed opposite Tommy, down at the lower end of the long table.

"Who's that for?" he demanded promptly. thought only Bill and I were to be here with you?" The same question had been on the tip of my own tongue, but I had thought just in time. I kicked at Jimmy Rogers's shins under the table, and he turned upon me a bewildered scowl, but Tommy only smiled. I think it was the saddest smile I have ever seen.

"Oh, yes, there's another," said he. "There's always another. Humour the whimsies of the mad, Jimmy. It does no harm. I'm-sorry about the chair, but-well, if it weren't there there'd only be a

row and a—and a nasty scene. You'll grow used to—her, presently, and not mind. At least, I hope so."

"Oh, yes, yes!" said Jimmy Rogers hastily. "Quite so! I—forgot, you know," and gave me a dismayed

glance across the table.

Then Tommy said "Ah!" under his breath, and rose to his feet. His eyes were upon the door at the farther end of the room. At first I did not understand. Then I kicked Jimmy Rogers again and we both stood up. We saw Tommy's eyes move slowly - as slowly as one would walk the length of that room-until they rested upon the chair at the other end of the table. Then he sat down again, and Jimmy and I dropped into our chairs. Jimmy Rogers's face was white as paper, and as for me I know my heart was beating faster than any man's heart should beat, and that the hair at the back of my head, over the collar, stirred, and the scalp felt oddly cold. It was Tommy's eyes that did it, I think, those moving eyes which so obviously rested upon a moving body which was quite invisible to us. It was more gruesomely horrible than any words can describe. Tommy had screamed, or shown terror in any way fainted, even, as people seeing ghosts are popularly supposed to do—I am certain that neither Jimmy Rogers nor I should have been afraid. It was his perfectly quiet and composed recognition of another being in our midst that got on our nerves. It was many days before I could face this particular thing with any composure, and I think I never watched Tommy's eyes move after something which I could not see without that quickened heart-beat and that cold stir at the back of my head. I once knew a dog which was haunted. In most respects it was a very ordinary dog of uncertain ancestry and mild disposition, but, when sitting quietly in the sun or crouching at rest beside one's feet, its eyes followed the movements of something which was, to the rest of the world, invisible. It was not a popular dog, and when it took to howling o' nights, the man who owned it gave it a large dose of rat poison. I could not help thinking of this wretched animal when I saw poor Tommy Carteret's eyes move from the door to that empty chair across the table and remain there.

It would be wholly impossible to call that first dinner of ours at the Hall a cheerful one. Heaven knows I did my best, but it was a poor best, and I think Jimmy Rogers played up to the best of his ability, but he was palpably nervous and unstrung. You must remember that he had not been so well prepared for what was before him as had I. Tommy was, of course, the coolest of us all, but even to him, I am sure, the situation was a painful one. He told me, long afterward, that more than once during the course of the dinner he heartily cursed himself for having dragged Jimmy and me into his haunted household, saying that it would have been a thousand times better to have stuck it out alone.

I remember that he never addressed any remark to the empty chair across the table, only answered, as briefly as possible, when the thing there spoke to him. At the first of these answers, coming, as it happened to do, after a little interval of silence, Jimmy Rogers started nervously and almost cried out, and the young footman, who was giving me some vegetables at the time, began to shake and nearly dropped his dish. Only old Parkins's face retained its wonted calm. Old Parkins, on duty, was emotion proof. Toward the end of the meal, all three of us simply bolted what was put before us, and when Tommy suggested that we have our coffee out on the veranda, which looks seaward, I could have cheered, for the room had become horrible to me. I was like a frightened old woman peering into dark corners.

On the broad veranda Jimmy Rogers and I dragged comfortable cane chairs up beside one of the little teatables and opened our cigarette-cases. Behind us, in the doorway, we heard Tommy's voice in low conversation. Then, after a moment, he paused beside

our table.

"Parkins will bring the coffee and things," he said, and there was an odd embarrassment in his tone. "I'll—if you don't mind, I'll just take a—a solitary turn or two down by the shore. I shall be with you presently." He went away down the steps, and it was oddly as if he were walking beside somebody—something about his bearing, the half-turn of his body, perhaps, gave one that impression. We watched him go, and, after a bit, saw his head turn and shake, or nod, and knew that he was talking.

Jimmy Rogers's chair creaked as he sank back in it. I met his eyes, and we stared at each other very soberly

for a minute or more, I should think.

"Look here, Bill!" said Jimmy Rogers, presently, "am I a damned coward?" I reserved judgment.

"I have fought through a portion of one war," he said deliberately. "I have been in action for hours together. I have fought two duels in France and Austria—and they weren't fake duels, either. I have knocked about rather more than most chaps ever do, and—well, look at that!" He held out toward me one of his hands, and the hand was shaking like a

drunkard's. I scowled at him uncomfortably, and shook my head.

"It's—a different sort of thing," said I. "No, I don't think you're a coward, Jimmy. "It's-different. I feel, myself, as if I should be afraid of the dark, to-night." Jimmy Rogers shivered.

"Don't talk about the dark!" said he.

The footman approached with the coffee things on a tray, and old Parkins followed with liqueurs.

"What liqueur, Mr. Rogers, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, damn!" said Jimmy Rogers, and sat up irri-

tably.

"Whiskey, Parkins!" he said. "Scotch whiskey in large quantities!" Parkins brought the decanter, and Jimmy Rogers filled his glass with a portion of scandalous size. I do not think I was far behind him. Then, when we had drunk, as eagerly as if we feared that Parkins would snatch the glasses from our lips, we sat back again in our chairs and watched the coffee

boil up in the glass bulb of the machine.

"I didn't come here quite unprepared," said Jimmy Rogers after a bit. "I knew something was wrong. I knew Tommy-well, saw things, but I didn't know it would be like this. I expected he'd have fits offits like delirium tremens or something like that. I shouldn't mind that, if it was good old Tommy, but -hang it, it's his eyes!" he cried with a little return of anger. "I can't stand his eyes moving about like that—following something I can't see. I shall be seeing it presently." He poured himself more whiskey and drank it gloomily.

"I expected to stay here a fortnight," he said, as he set down the glass, "but I don't know." I don't know."

"You're not going to desert Tommy?" I cried.

"You're not going to run just when Tommy needs you? By Jove, I thought better of you than-"

"Oh, chuck that!" said Jimmy Rogers crossly. "Can't I have a bit of a growl if I want to? To tell you the truth, Bill, I'm ghastly afraid—and so are you,

if only you'd be honest and admit it."

"I'm not denying it," said I. "I am afraid, but I expect we shall become used to the thing, after a bit, and not mind. I expect we shall learn to take it as

Tommy does, quite quietly. He isn't afraid."

"No," said Jimmy Rogers, slowly. "No, Tommy isn't afraid. Do you know I fancy he's too tired to be afraid of anything." And afterward, when I thought it over, it occurred to me that this speech of Jimmy Rogers' was the shrewdest thing I had ever heard him say.

"And yet," said I, "though it doesn't frighten him -as the ordinary sort of ghost frightens the ordinary sort of man-still it's wearing on him horribly. You've seen his face! That wasn't all done down in his Egypt country. It's this—this possession, this haunting-whatever-you-like-to-call-it-that's driving him

mad."

"Driving him mad?" queried Jimmy Rogers oddly. "Oh, he's not mad now," said I. "He's no more mad than you are. He merely sees something that you don't-and hears it. There's some sort of fourth dimension somewhere about, if you like, and Tommy sees into it. You can't make him believe that thiswoman doesn't exist objectively. You can't make him believe that the whole thing's in his brain. he is not mad, you know."

"Of course it is all in his brain!" said Jimmy Rogers, staring at me through the dusk. There seemed to me to be some sort of half-question—half-appeal—in his tone.

"I don't know," said I. "I suppose so—Oh, Lord! yes, of course! Still—hang it, the woman grows older. She says and does things Tommy has never thought of. She sees what's about her. She has grown fat since she—since she came. How should I know?"

Jimmy Rogers reached for the decanter.

"Fancy it!" he said in a hushed, half-frightened voice. "Just fancy having such a thing about! I expect the—I expect she's just as real to him as we are!"

"Of course she is!" said I.

"Fancy it!" he said again. "Gad, I'd—I'd shirk it all. I'd shoot myself." He leaned forward in his

chair, shaking his lighted cigarette at me.

"Look here!" he said, "how's it all going to end? What reason have you—or I, or any one—for thinking that Tommy's ever going to be any better? This—thing, if I understand, doesn't grow less real to him as time goes on; it grows more so. What's to come of it all?"

"Why, as to that," said I, "God knows—maybe. I don't. Our lookout, I take it, is to keep him as cheerful as we can—make things as pleasant and amusing as we can, and otherwise to sit tight and wait. Oh! that surgeon-alienist man in Paris, McPherson—McKenzie—whatever his name is—"

"McKenzie!" said Jimmy Rogers shortly. I opened my eyes.

"How did you happen to know?" I demanded.

"I've lived in Paris, haven't I?" said Jimmy Rogers.
"I know McKenzie. He attended some one—a young girl whom I—a young girl who was—mad, but didn't know it."

"Well?" said I. "Well?"

"She died," said Jimmy Rogers. "It wasn't McKenzie's fault. She found out that she was mad and—died. So I came away."

"Ah!" said I, remembering half-forgotten things I had once heard. Ah, well! we all have our little

histories."

"What did you begin to say about McKenzie?"

demanded Jimmy Rogers, presently.

"Oh, yes!" said I. "This McKenzie chap said an odd thing to Tommy. It was after he'd been making a sort of an examination of him. He said:

"'If ever you're cured, it will be through another

woman.' Odd, what?"

"We're not women," said Jimmy Rogers.

"No!" said I, "but Sibyl Eliot, over at Red Rose, is, isn't she?"

Jimmy Rogers sat up in his chair.

"Sibyl Eliot!" he cried. "Sibyl—you don't mean—That's why she has kept so quiet this winter, then! Sib, of all people! Well, I'm damned!—Sibyl Eliot!" he said to himself again after a little pause. "I am damned!" he said, and retired into silence, shaking a bewildered head.

Then Tommy came up from his stroll. He went directly to the open doors of the house and stood there an instant, with a final low-spoken word or two to that invisible presence, then turned back to where Jimmy Rogers and I sat beside our table in the gathering dark. It was not a hot evening, but I remember that Tommy pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead before he dragged a chair up to the table.

"Coffee cold?" he asked.

"Afraid it is," said I. "I let the lamp under the machine go out."

"It doesn't matter," said Tommy. "I didn't really want any. Shove that decanter across, will you?"

He lighted a cigarette and smoked it half down, sitting back in his chair. Then he turned his wry, sad smile upon Jimmy Rogers.

"Leaving us in the morning, Jimmy?" he inquired.

Jimmy Rogers wriggled in his seat.

"Not by a—not unless you turn me out!" he growled. "What the deuce d'you mean?" I thought Tommy

drew a long breath, as it were of relief.

"Nothing," said he. "I—I was afraid you wouldn't be able to stand it. That's all. You hadn't been so well prepared as Bill had. You've good sporting blood, Jimmy." He threw away his cigarette and lighted another one. When a man lights a match and holds it to the end of a cigarette or a cigar, you get a very fair idea of the state of his nerves. Tommy's, in these days, were habitually bad. As I had said to Jimmy Rogers, the thing was wearing on him horribly. The question was—so it seemed to me—how long would he be able to bear it?

"For the love of Heaven," said he presently, "talk, talk! Talk about something cheerful. Tell me a

funny story—any sort of story. Only, talk!"

We sat talking for an hour or two. Each of us did his best, I think. Then we went indoors and played pool—or played at it—for another hour. I fancy it was one or two o'clock when we finally climbed the stairs to our beds. Tommy had a certain scarab which he wished to show to Jimmy Rogers, and we stepped into his room for a moment, while he got it out, before going on down the corridor to our own quarters.

A little brass bed stood at one side of the room, as narrow as a steamship's berth, and there was no other bed to be seen. I had been told of this dreadful feature of poor Tommy's possession, and beyond the first start of surprise paid no attention, but I saw Jimmy Rogers staring at it curiously, and half an hour later, as I was about to turn off my lights for the night, he came into my room, pajama-clad and with a cigarette between his lips.

"Look here!" he said, "did you notice that—that silly little bunk of Tommy's? Proper railway berth. Tommy didn't use to be such a Spartan. What's it

for?"

"He's afraid!" said I. "Poor devil, he's afraid!"

"Afraid of what?" demanded Jimmy Rogers, staring. So then I told him of that horrible scene which was nightly enacted, and Jimmy Rogers cursed aloud in sheer amazement.

"I expect it's going on now," said I, "if one could be there to see."

"Good God!" said Jimmy Rogers softly. "But, I say, look here!" he cried after a moment, and raised his puzzled eyes to mine. "Look here, you know! I don't quite see yet. I don't quite see what he's afraid of. If I understand the thing properly, the woman is visible and audible to him, but not—what do you call it?—tangible. He can't touch her, nor she him? What? He could put a hand through her, or walk through her just as if she were air. What's he afraid of, then, at night? All he has to do is to shut his eyes, I should think. Don't you see, you idiot? She's not tangible to him."

And then it was my turn to look puzzled.

"Right you are!" said I, "Hanged if I see it, either!

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No, she's not tangible, certainly. She has no actual substance, even to Tommy. Hanged if I see it! I know he's afraid, horribly afraid, of something. What do you suppose he's afraid of? I must ask him about that. Anyhow, it's rum, what?"

"Rum?" said Jimmy Rogers with scorn, "Rum?" He went on to say that it was rum, but the manner of

his saying it will not bear repetition.

# CHAPTER XX

#### WHAT TOMMY DREADED

So, at Baychester by the Sound, we began our watch and ward of Tommy Carteret. I had almost said our fight for Tommy, but fight hardly expresses it, since at the first, at least, it was but a passive fight. Later it became militant enough, aggressive enough, Heaven knows, but in these first few weeks there seemed no way opened to us, no method made plain for going about anything radical. All that we could do to cheer him, to keep his body active, and his mind upon matters far removed from his troubles, we did, and, I think, with some success. I do not think Tommy was desperately unhappy in these days. Indeed, for much of the time I think he was quite the reverse. He played golf and he played tennis. He swam and rode and sailed about in the cat-boat—though, as to this last, he had one day an unfortunate mishap. It seems that while three or four of us were in the boat, and Tommy at the tiller, she came aboard, and Tommy's nerves gave way with a rush and he nearly upset us. After that he went out as a passenger.

But though we could fill his days with healthy activity, lead his thoughts afield—not far afield, eh, Sib?—yet remained that awful hour when, day and evening being done, Tommy mounted with laggard steps to his bedroom and one stood in an open doorway, leering invitation—calling, coaxing. And often, I know, there

followed upon this, more—pleadings, storms of vituperation, bursts of rage. Often, I fancy, she wept before him, used all the weapons a woman, at such a time, can forge.

I am given to seeing events which interest me in vivid pictures. In Tommy Carteret's life there are three pictures which stand out in strong, positive, pitiless tones, which will not fade or be forgotten. Of two of them I have already spoken. The first is of young Tommy standing at the window of the house in Washington Square and staring out into the dawn. The second is of Tommy sitting alone by night in the cabin on Half-Breed Hill, nodding, nodding through the hours. And the third is this dreadful scene which went on nightly during the time of which I am now writing—poor Tommy, with his hands over his eyes, crouching in a chair or against the wall, and before him that shadow in the guise of a sobbing, pleading woman.

So nightly, as you see, the blocks we had so hopefully builded up during the day were cast down again, and there seemed no opening before us. I think we all despaired more than once-all, that is, save Sibyl. Sibyl, God bless her! would never, even for a moment, confess to hope weakened or heart cast down. I have known many brave women, and I believe that almost all women, when fighting or enduring for love's sake, are braver than any man can be, but of all those whom I have known, Sibyl was, in these days, the bravestcame to each day's battle with a pluckier smile, saw her work nightly undone with a more undaunted spirit. I like to think of the look of her beautiful face when, after I, coward that I was, had been confessing my despair of ever gaining headway, she would grip my arm with her two hands and shake it a bit and say:

"Never you give up hope, Bill; we'll save him yet. I know we shall save him."

She and Tommy were together almost every dayalone together, I mean, for, of course, the two households, Red Rose and the Hall, were practically one from morning until night, and all five of us were constantly together. But Tommy and Sibyl had a truly wonderful knack of disappearing, under the eyes of the multitude, as it were, and turning up again, two or three hours later, much pleased with themselves and with all the world. Hours of Paradise these must have been for Tommy. Sometimes the two would play a desultory round of golf-they always forgot their scores; sometimes they would go off for a long drive in one of the traps; but oftenest, I think, they found comfortable and secluded corners in Tommy's rose-garden. None of the rest of us ever dared go there for fear of running upon them. And, curiously enough, the woman—the phantom, what you will-never, with possibly one or two exceptions, attempted to spy them out and make it uncomfortable for Tommy. I do not, even now, understand this. It would have been so decidedly "in character" for her to do it. I can offer no explanation. was so, that is all.

I had, during these days—as I believe I have already said—further long talks with Tommy, two or three of them, on the subject of what had taken place during the past year and what was going on now. And in the first of these, I remember, I spoke to him on that matter which Jimmy Rogers and I had discussed the first night at the Hall—that matter which had set us wondering. I asked him, sans phrase, of what he was afraid—why he slept in that narrow little bed—what he dreaded beyond the present horror. At first I thought that

Tommy would not answer me, for he flushed up, and turned his head away, and sat silent for some time. Then, at last, he turned to me with that half-

embarrassed, deprecating little laugh of his.

"I've a mind to say nothing at all," he said. "You'll only think I'm quite mad, Bill, madder than you thought before—quite hopelessly mad. You see, it's like this——" And then again I thought I should get nothing out of him, for there he seemed to stick, and he twisted about in his chair—we were sitting on the seaward veranda—and scowled at his innocent pipe, and words seemed to desert him.

"You see," he said again, after a bit, "it's like this. I—the thing has come to me, as you might say, by stages, Bill. At least, it seems so as I look back over it. It has gone on becoming more and more real—she has, you know—more human and all that. You and Jimmy can't get yourselves into my place at all when you think of—her. To you she's a sort of—of ghost, a sort of spook. She gives you chills, like a haunted house. I expect you instinctively think of her as wearing a sheet and moaning in dark corners. What?"

I had to laugh, for Tommy had hit it so well! We knew better, of course, Jimmy and I, but instinctively I think we both thought of the woman as appearing to Tommy just like that—a sheeted, terror-inspiring ghost. "Whereas," said Tommy, "she's—she's exactly like one of you, you know. There's nothing supernatural about her; she's—so far as my eyes and ears can make out—ordinary flesh and blood. Well, now, the point's here. I say she has been growing more and more real to me, Bill, but have you ever thought that there's one last thing which hasn't yet been reached?"

"Touch!" said I. "Good God, Tommy, you're not

afraid of that?" I needn't have asked, for I saw his eyes just then, and they were full of an awful dread.

"Just that, Bill!" said he, nodding. "It's the last step. We've taken all the others. Granted tangibility, she'd have me—she'd have me absolutely in her power

-absolutely, do you understand?"

"I understand only too well!" said I, "but it can't be, Tommy! It's too frightful, it's too fiendish. It's beyond words. Oh, it's impossible, you know, impossible!"

"Is anything impossible, Bill?" said he with a little sigh. "I think not. A year ago, you know, I should have said that a great lot of things were impossible. You can't quite expect me to think the same now. If what I have been through is possible, if what I go through now, every day of the week, is possible, why not an added feature? Why not a paltry increment in the way of an extra susceptibility? She has come back from beyond, as I suppose other people must have done, at other times. She has succeeded in breaking through my sense limitations to the extent of my seeing her, hearing her. Why not, in time, the last step? Why not, Bill?" And I think something grew cold inside me. Why not, indeed? Since the gods seemed to have picked upon poor Tommy for their sport, why set a limit? Who were we, after all, to say where their sport should cease—or when? But the very hopelessness of the thing, the very sense of its being so far out of and above our hands, wakened in me a sort of childish, futile anger.

"I tell you, Tommy," I cried fiercely, "the thing's impossible! It is impossible, for all sorts of good, sound physical reasons. Granted that you see and hear this—this—I never know what to call her—this illusion, well

and good! That's possible enough of explanation in a purely subjective way. The whole matter is in your brain——"

"Is it, Bill?" said Tommy, with his tired smile. "Is it, though?"

"It must be!" said I quite snappishly. "Anyhow, it can be. For argument's sake, we'll say so. But, my son, when you begin to endow your illusion with physical properties, tangible, objective qualities, you've quite a different thing of it. Lots of people have seen ghosts, and heard 'em, too, by Jove, but nobody ever touched one. Argue me out of that, if you can."

I regret to say that Tommy seemed not greatly impressed by this masterpiece of reason, nor even greatly interested in it. It had sounded very convincing to me.

"Of course there's an important flaw in that as mere argument," said Tommy, rubbing a weary hand across his eyes, "but even if there weren't, even if it were impregnable, what of it, Bill? What of it? Am I one to be convinced by argument? There's no reason, there's no possibility, as you might say, in what I endure now, every day. Yet I endure it. It's there, though reason says it can't be. All in my brain? Bill, Bill! Can my brain compass a woman's altering in appearance as time goes on, growing older and all that? Can my brain carry on two sides of a conversation upon some topic I didn't choose? Can my brain produce those scenes I have to go through every evening? No, I think not."

There was nothing to say to this; I had no retort for him. He spoke quite truly; he was beyond argument. But I harked back to the original question.

"And so that's what you're dreading!" said I.

"That's what you're afraid of, this—this last step, as you call it."

"Daily, Bill," said Tommy under his breath.

"Daily!"

"And you think," I probed further, "that she'sshe's trying for it? You think that's what she's after when she—that is, well, evenings, and all that, you know?"

"That's what she wants, I think," said Tommy. "For the present, you see, she has only partial-what shall I say-control over me. Then she'd have me absolutely. Aye, that's what she's after, and I'm afraid. You don't know what black, bitter, abiding fear is. It's not like being frightened, for there's no end to it. It's like-why, I expect it's like a man who knows he's going blind, or a man who knows some fatal disease has got hold on him-almost. I'm not giving up hope altogether, you know, but I'm afraid, Bill. I'm afraid."

Later in the day, when Tommy and Sibyl were away somewhere together, I spoke of this conversation to old Arabella Crowley and Jimmy Rogers. I spoke very frankly, withholding nothing, for I often converse with Arabella quite as man to man. She is an old woman, and it is a compliment which rather pleases her. I remember, though, that Jimmy Rogers more than once turned a scandalised eye upon me, and an apprehensive

one upon old Arabella.

And, when I had finished, Arabella nodded slowly,

looking grave.

"I see," she said. "I knew he was afraid of something beyond the present trouble, but I didn't know what. I have often wondered. What a thing! And they say that God is kind." She nodded again presently.

"He was right, you know," she said. "He is quite beyond argument. Argument is mere sound to him. And he was right, too, about the flaw in your reasoning, William. The added sense of touch need not make the—apparition, shall I say?—objective, substantial, because it would affect him only. Why not a deluded sense of touch, as well as of sight or of hearing? Tommy knows that his woman is breaking physical laws all the while. He sees her open a door and come into the room. Well, you could prove to him that that door had not opened at all and he would believe you, but what good would it do? He saw the woman come in. He saw the door open. Argument can't reach that."

Then, for a long time, we sat silent, I think, Jimmy and I scowling hopelessly across at each other, and Mrs. Crowley busy with some absurd knitting.

After a bit she spoke again.

"Sibyl makes life bearable for him," she said, "but this can't go on forever. Things go either backward or forward. That's a law. Unless something happens, Tommy will one day go his last step, and then, I suppose, he'll shoot himself, or—Heaven knows what."

"Then," said I, "I pray Heaven something may happen."

"Amen!" said old Arabella, nodding over her work.

Jimmy Rogers knocked the ash out of his pipe and

looked up.

"When I went up to town on Monday," he said, "I ran upon a chap in the University Club whom you used to know, Bill. He was in New Haven with us. Tommy knew him too. His name's Carstairs."

"Ah!" said I, "I've heard of him several times in the past two or three years. Surgeon, isn't he?"

"Ripping good one, I'm told," said Jimmy Rogers, "even if he is a young chap. Done some fine things. Well, the point is, I—well, I told him a bit about Tommy—leaving the name out, of course, and I asked him what he thought the thing might be."

Old Arabella laid down her knitting and looked up

sharply.

"Well?" she demanded. "Well?"

"Of course," said Jimmy Rogers, "he wanted to see Tommy. He wanted to study the case, as they say, but the odd thing was that he laughed at the notion of its being incurable."

"Yes, but hang it!" said I, "that McPherson, McKenzie man thought a cure was doubtful. Did you tell him

that?"

"I did," said Jimmy Rogers.

"And what did he say?" I asked.

"He laughed again," said Jimmy Rogers.

Old Arabella took up her knitting.

"Could you," she inquired, "persuade this surgeon young man, do you think, to come to me, at Red Rose, for a week? You might tell him that I pine for congenial society."

## CHAPTER XXI

## "Brig o' Dread"

On the night of this same day Tommy had a sort of battle royal with the woman Mariana. It was but one of many such scenes, but I set it down for a certain reason which will, later on, be evident. It seems that she had been in a bad temper for some days, given to fits of rage over nothing, moody and, for her, silent when not storming. At dinner on this day she had made a scene which, for all of Tommy's efforts, could not but be evident to Jimmy and to me. We spent the evening at Red Rose, where Sibyl played to us and sang a number of old ballads very sweet and quaint, and Sibyl had a golden voice-still has, for that matter. When we returned to the Hall we had a good-night game of pool and a last pipe, and separated, a bit after midnight I should think, in the upper hallway.

Tommy says that he hardly expected the woman to appear at all that night, for she had left the dinner table in a furious rage, and so he went into his room and switched on the electrics with a certain sense of freedom, a sense almost of gaiety, as one might feel who is promised a day's respite from habitual pain. The woman was sitting in a chair beside an open window and looking out into the soft, warm night.

It seems that Tommy uttered a little exclamation when he saw her there, and made as if he would go back

out of the room, but the woman turned and sneered at him.

"You might as well come in," she said. "I aim to wait until you do." Then Tommy shut the door and, crossing the room slowly, dropped down in another chair which stood some distance from hers. She did not immediately speak again, and he, so he says, sat drooping in his chair—all that glad sense of elation and hope gone from him, sunken once more in bitterness—and stared across at her, waiting for her to begin.

He says that by some freakish whim of the mind a certain dull curiosity came upon him-due possibly to his talk with me, on that morning—so that he looked at her critically, dispassionately, as one might, with a cold and scientific eye, examine some strange phenomenon. She was, as always at this hour, in her thin night-dress with that tawdry, soiled dressing-gown thrown over it, and Tommy, thinking of his argument with me, wondered, grimly amused, where and how the woman had come by it. She had no physical substance, hence this wrap must have none. Yet such a garment could not have come with her out of her former life; it was too fine for that; it was an expensive garment covered with lace and ribbons and embroidery and such, only soiled and unkempt. Where had she come by it? And where by those other clothes which she wore in the daytime? He remembered that they all had this air-too much ornament, too much colour, too little sense of the appropriate and fitting. It seemed to him-sitting in judgment, thus, outside himself—an interesting feature of the case. He says that he made a mental note to discuss it with me, one day. He says that he was on the point of asking the woman about it, but refrained,

for he did not care to break her silence. It would be broken soon enough without that.

From the garment she wore he looked up at her face, and-mind you he was deliberately critical, for the time, deliberately outside himself-it came to him with a fresh intensity how amazingly she had grown to resemble her sister, Rose Barrows. He had almost laughed when the sister had prophesied this. At that time the thing had seemed incredible. She was too young, too round, and brown and blooming, and far too beautiful, he would have said, ever to come to such a state. But she had come to it. He looked at her with narrowed eyes and said to himself that she must have gained twenty pounds. She was still, in a large, coarse fashion, handsome-no longer beautiful, but there were unpleasant lines at the corners of her mouth and about the eyes, and the skin under her eyes was beginning to form little purses, as it is apt to do in women of that type. Her face had far too much colour; also, it was florid; and her eyes had taken on a curiously hard, defiant stare.

"It's as if," said Tommy to himself, "as if she had lived ten years in these ten months. I wonder why that is?"

He tried to go on in this mood of dispassionate examination and reasoning, but the mood failed him abruptly, and a great depression followed in its steps, with a sort of miserable futile anger playing about the depression.

"For God's sake, Mariana!" he cried, starting up in his chair, "how long is this hell to endure?" The

woman turned a sullen face to him.

"Oh! you'll talk at last, will you?" she said.

"How long?" said Tommy, and his eyes burned under their lowered brows.

"Until you come the rest of the way," said she, and, after a moment, laughed low under her breath. And then Tommy shook his head, taking his eyes from her, and sank back once more in his chair. He knew this mood of hers.

"A long waiting!" said he, and his jaw set hard.

"You'll come," she nodded. "I reckon you'll come.

I can wait—and then—"

"And then?" said Tommy.

Oddly, a little crying, whining fit of passion came over her, so that she began to tremble, and fidget with her hands.

"I'm sick o' waiting!" she said. "Ain't you—aren't you never going to come? What makes you hate me so? You—didn't always hate me. You used to—care. You said 'at you did, anyways. What makes you hate me? I ain't any different, am I? am I? You wanted to marry me once. Why won't you marry me now?"

"Must we go over all this again?" said Tommy wearily, from his chair. "We have said it all so often! Can you not see how horribly different everything is? Oh, it's preposterous! it's unspeakable! Are you trying to drive me to my death? You'll do it in time, you know."

The woman's eyes flashed upon him suddenly, and her lips widened to an awful smile which she tried to smother with her two hands.

"By God!" said Tommy in a low whisper, staring at her. "By God, I believe that's what you're trying to do! You want me to—come to you—that way!" But the woman broke out upon him in a sort of panic.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried. "No, it ain't—it isn't that! Honest, it isn't that. I swear it isn't. I just—want you for myself. We're as good as married. You were going to marry me. In another hour we'd 'a' ben married. Why can't we pretend we was? Nobody'd ever know. Why can't we pretend?"

She slipped out of her chair and dragged herself on her knees near to him—not too near; not near enough to be within reach, for she had acquired a sort of fiendish cunning about this. She seemed to know that if Tommy could put out his hand and pass it through her, as through air, her spell over him must snap in an instant. Just beyond his hand's touch she was a woman of flesh and blood, with all the allurements, all the power to tempt and draw that any woman might wield. From that little distance she could defy him to think her an illusion—within the danger zone her power was nothing.

"I don't aim to make you miserable!" she cried, kneeling before him. A little sob ran through her voice, and her hands twisted together in her lap. "I didn't come for that. Honest, I didn't, but—you hate me so! You're always a-madding me an' I—I lose

my temper. Ef you'd on'y-come!"

"Come?" said Tommy in a bitter voice—but I think that, for the moment, he had himself in hand and was trying to trap her into some admission. "Come? Come to what? You're mad! What more can you have in store for me? Come to what? You're a shade, a phantom. I cannot touch you. If I should lean forward and put out my hand it would pass through you as if you were empty air. Come to what?" But the woman nodded her head with that same cunning, widening smile which had something awful about it,

"On'y—come!" she said in an eager whisper. "You'll know—soon. They's something you don't—know about. On'y come! Just once; just this once!" The cunning smile widened still and broke into a shaking, nervous laugh, horrible to hear. But an odd little fit of anger swept over the man in the chair.

"Will nothing rid me of you?" he cried harshly. "Will you never leave me in peace?"

"Not until somebody has a better right to you than I've got," said she. "An' that ain't likely, I reckon."

"No!" said Tommy, with his face in his hands. "No, that's not likely. I'm under a curse. I'm unclean. I wish to Heaven I might die!" He did not see the woman's face when he said that. I wish he had. I have a notion that it might have been illuminating.

Then, after a moment, she dragged herself nearer still on her knees, so near that he heard the stir of the linen and lace over her breast as she breathed—heard the breath come and go sharply between her teeth—caught the odour of some heavy, over-powerful scent which she wore on her garments or on her hair. It was a hot night, and this scent seemed peculiarly well to go with it—a cloying, heavy scent like the suffocating odour of roses in a greenhouse. It seemed to go with—nay, to characterise, the whole wretched scene.

"On'y—come!" said the woman in a whisper. "You'll be glad. Truly you will—glad! Come to-night! Some day you've got to come, you know. You—can't stan' this forever. I'll make it jus' what you said 'at it was, a hell for you, till you do. Some day you've got to come. Why not now?" The little half-sob, half-laugh was running through her

words again, and the hands which she stretched out toward him trembled with eagerness.

Tommy's hands slipped from his face and dropped nerveless into his lap. His eyes stared wide and very weary—overwrought, overstrained, at the woman who knelt and trembled an arm's length away, dishevelled, pleading, racked with desire. She had been strong in that thing we call physical magnetism when she was alive—oddly strong: she was strong now, and Tommy, I think, very weak. He was worn out.

As she knelt there, the light from the electrics fell across one shoulder and upon her cheek and lifted chin. By some odd trick of it, she looked, for an instant, younger, slighter, more the Mariana of Egypt land. What was there about the pose, about the way that light fell across her cheek and upon her breast? What was there about this still heat and the cloying, suffocating scent? Tommy's eyes closed for a moment.

The little gully where the blackberries grew! where Mariana of the Dutch Creek road had knelt and pleaded with him!

"On'y—come!" she said again, breathing between her words.

"Why not?" said Tommy Carteret, with his odd, fixed stare. "Why not?" and the woman cried out aloud.

"You'll—come?" she said. "You'll come? Oh, yes, yes! Come!" she stumbled to her feet, laughing her broken, hysterical, sobbing laugh, and crossed the room, looking back at him as she went.

"Come!" she said, and opened the door to the farther room.

Tommy Carteret rose, swaying a bit, and followed her. His eyes still bore that fixed stare, like a man under hypnotic control, and his feet groped to their

steps.

What did he think to find in that room beyond, the completing sense, or-the end of all things? I do not know. Something definite, surely; something to end this torture of uncertainty and dread. I can imagine that he did not much care what he went toonly that it be decisive. Something I ascribe to his mood, doubtless, to the weariness and despair of that hour, but, in any case, I think he was nearly at the end of endurance. Yes, I can imagine that he did not much care what he went to.

"Come!" said the woman, standing in the open door, and she went through into the farther room, looking back over her shoulder at him-holding his eyes with hers. He heard her laugh in the dark beyond and he

put up his hands over his eyes.

"I'm coming! I'm coming!" he said, and crashed into the door with such force that he reeled back from the impact and nearly fell, and at last stood shaking, his eyes fixed before him-for both bolt and key were on his side, and the key was turned, and the

bolt, through long disuse, rusted home.

#### CHAPTER XXII

## OLD TOMMY DOES WHAT HE CAN

It was just about this time that we heard in a rather odd fashion both of and from old Tommy Carteret. A certain middle-aged Englishman, late of the diplomatic service, a man of some note, happened to be in New York for two or three days en route from Japan to London. He had been an admirer of Arabella Crowley some years before, and Arabella had him out at Red Rose for luncheon one day. It chanced that three or four of us—Arabella, the Englishman, Jimmy Rogers, I think, and I—were sitting on the veranda there when Tommy Carteret came across from the Hall to find Sibyl, with whom he was to go driving.

Old Arabella, of course, introduced the two men, and the Englishman looked after young Tommy, as he moved away, nodding his head with approval.

"That young man has a fine face!" he said, "a strong face, though not happy, I should think. He is the type one instinctively wishes to know more of. Did you say the name was Cartwright or Carteret?"

"Carteret," said old Arabella. "Thomas Carteret."

The Englishman looked up with some surprise.

"That is odd!" said he.

"Odd?" demanded old Arabella. "How, odd?"

"An odd coincidence of names," said the man. "I knew a Thomas Carteret in Hong Kong last winter—

at least, I think the name was Carteret. It may have been Cartwright. I happen never to have seen it written. He was a much older man than your young friend there—sixty, I should think; an interesting man." Old Arabella's eyes drooped for a moment.

"Yes?" she said politely; "in what way was he in-

teresting?"

"He was oddly—lovable," said the Englishman, with a little laugh over the word. "He was one of the very rare people whom no one can help liking. He will have been a great favourite among women, all his life, I am sure. Indeed, I heard at Hong Kong that half a dozen women there had been—slightly indiscreet, at least, over him, and, mind you, he is quite sixty if not more. An interesting man!"

Mrs. Crowley looked up quite calmly.

"He does not sound altogether—pleasant," she said. "A rather untrustworthy person, I should think—an old beau."

"Yes," said the man, nodding thoughtfully. "Yes, I expect he will have been untrustworthy. Still—it isn't the steady-running, trustworthy sort that makes a picturesque spot in life, is it? Now this old chap out in Hong Kong I should pick to be almost without a moral sense, and almost without any strength of character—I don't mean that he is vicious, but—well, weak, very weak and constitutionally incapable of facing pain. And yet, everybody loved him. Now, if I were a novel-writer," he said, laughing gently, "I should pick that old chap and write a book round him. I promise you it would be interesting."

Old Arabella seemed to give a little shiver as if she

suddenly felt cold.

"Interesting, doubtless," she said, as if the topic

had begun to bore her a bit, "but rather too tragic to be pleasing, I should think. The suffering such a man spreads about him, as he goes, is sufficiently heavy to outweigh his charm." But the Englishman wagged a stubborn head.

"No one could help loving the man," he insisted. "There was something—sweet about him. You'd have loved him yourself, if he'd ever passed your way."

That was how we heard of old Tommy, and, as things so frequently fall out, it was the very next morning that we heard from him.

I was walking on the high bank which overhangs the sandy beach near Tommy's cove. It was one of those entirely perfect summer days which inspire poets to write things—blue overhead, blue out at sea—out on the Sound, that is—blue made bluer by white, dipping sails and an occasional trail of black or creamy smoke from a steamer. Gulls wheeled overhead, mewing plaintively; birds squabbled among the shrubbery beneath me, cheeping and cursing and making love to each other. A tiny surf plashed in over the sand, and a landward breeze, a lazy, cool breeze full of the sweet savour of the sea, came with it.

I had refilled my pipe and was just about arriving at that pleasantly melancholy stage in which one recalls other perfect days, and sighs and says to himself, "If only——" etc., when I caught sight of old Arabella coming toward me across the wide lawn. I thought that her face bore an odd smile and I noticed that she held a letter in one hand.

"Good morning, William," said old Arabella. "I am sorry to see that you cannot enjoy this Heaven-sent day without steeping yourself in vile tobacco smoke.

Have you, er, a cigarette about you?" I had, and old Arabella lighted it with apparent satisfaction.

"Have you seen Tommy this morning?" she went

on.

"I breakfasted with him a half-hour ago," said I, "but we didn't speak ten words to each other. Tommy had a lot of letters and buried himself in them. One seemed to amuse him."

"It might well," said Mrs. Crowley, "if it didn't make him weep. It left me undecided between the two."

"Oh, you read it, Aunt Arabella?" I asked.

"Tommy gave it to me," she said. "It is from—old Tommy."

"The deuce!" said I.

"Quite so!" said Arabella. "It is odd coming so soon after what we heard of him yesterday. He is married."

I sat down upon the turf and stared. "He is married to poor little Anne Hartwell," said Arabella. "It seems that she went out to him at Hong Kong, a month ago—I knew she had left New York—and they were married at once. They're in Batavia, and mean to stay there, or near, up in the mountains, somewhere."

"Married!" said I in a sort of gasp. "Old Tommy Carteret married! I can't believe it. It's not in him."

"It evidently was in him," said Mrs. Crowley, and lowered herself cautiously to the turf beside me. She had maintained an air of careless indifference, a half-jocular air, but there was an unusual colour in her cheeks, and her hand, as she raised her cigarette or flicked off the ash, was not quite steady. She was more excited over the thing than she cared to admit, I fancy.

"Married!" I croaked again, shaking my head.

"Old Tommy Carteret married!" Then, after quite a time, Arabella looked at me, and there was a sort of wistfulness in her eyes, I thought—a sort of half-timidity.

"He—did his best, William," she said. "It was as if she asked a question. "He was long about it, and there wasn't much that he could do, but—at the last he did what he could."

"Yes," said I, for I saw that she wanted me to help her whitewash poor old Tommy. "Oh, yes, he did his best—at last. He'd have done more, I fancy, long ago, if he could have, but I—expect he just couldn't. He wasn't very strong, Aunt Arabella, and he— What was it that chap said yesterday? 'He was incapable of facing pain.' That's it, I think! He was quite incapable of facing pain."

"Yes, yes, William!" said old Mrs. Crowley with a sort of eagerness. "He just couldn't do it. He was so very weak. You—don't expect heroism of a child, do you? Old Tommy was a child in some ways. He couldn't deny himself what he wanted, and—couldn't take punishment." She looked down at the letter in her lap and smoothed it with her two hands, smiling

over it.

"I wish I might read you this," she said, after a bit, "but I am afraid Tommy wouldn't wish me to. It's—it would make you feel less bitter toward old Tommy, I think. He has suffered too, William. He has suffered as much as it is in him to suffer, I think. It is rather a—nice letter, not so cowardly as one would have feared. It's franker, somehow.—I'm glad he married her," she said. "I—had been feeling very bitter toward him on young Tommy's account. I had said to myself that he was unworthy of the smallest consideration. I called him hard names, William, hard

names, and it hurt me to do that. I'm glad he has married Anne Hartwell. I shall be able to—like him again, now." She looked up at me once more with that little half-timid smile, and the colour deepened a bit in her cheeks.

"It had been a—habit!" she said, "liking old Tommy. I was very fond of him. Now I shall be

able to resume the habit—and I'm glad."

It was just about at this time, too, that young Carstairs the surgeon, of whom Jimmy Rogers had spoken, came to Red Rose. It is because his coming belongs here in order of time—here in these days of comparative uneventfulness—that I jumble it in together with what I have just told of our news of old Tommy. Of course, the two things have nothing to do with each other. I do not know just why he consented to come, for he was as busy as a young surgeon with a rather extraordinary reputation might be supposed to be. It will have been partly, I think, a keen professional interest in Tommy Carteret's unusual affliction, and partly—he was a wise young man, Carstairs—a recognition that it would be well to oblige a woman of Arabella Crowley's social position in New York life.

He came for a week-end, but circumstances, which will appear later on, kept him with us much longer. We did not, at first, tell Tommy who the man was. We presented him simply as an old friend of Mrs. Crowley's. Tommy remembered having had a nodding acquaintance with him in New Haven, but he (Tommy) had been so little in America during the five years since he had taken his degree that Carstairs' professional fame was quite unknown to him. We were afraid of awakening in him some resentment, if not outright defiance, if we admittedly set a doctor over him, but I am not

sure that we need have feared. Certainly when, after two or three long talks which the two had, the truth was made plain, Tommy showed no resentment whatever. He showed no interest, either, I must admit, for, I think, he was well past hope; but he was not angry.

I think Carstairs was good for him. He was one of those men who are born to be healers just as certain women are born to nurse. He bore an air of quiet power, a soothing, reassuring air. There are many such men in his profession. One sinks back with a breath of relief as they come into the room. One feels instinctively that they are strong for good—very strong and adequate.

I said Tommy showed no interest. That was hasty, perhaps. A certain thing had shaken him, and his mind was not yet readjusted to its new focus. It was the matter of that locked and bolted door. He had been so certain that the presence which haunted him had an objective existence—walked through the world like himself, though invisible to all save his eyes—that when he had attempted to enter an open doorway and found the doorway closed—the door-bolt rusted fast—it had shocked and bewildered him oddly. It was as if the physical world had suddenly thrust a very tangible fist into his face as he sat dreaming. He could not make it out.

I have no doubt that Carstairs pressed this advantage hard, for he was a skilful and shrewd man, not one to neglect an opportunity. I have no doubt that he used it by way of proving to poor Tommy that his vision walked only through his own perturbed brain and not through the outer world at all, and hence that through his own brain it must be exorcised. But when it came to what Carstairs wished to do, Tommy stuck fast. After all, he was but shaken, bewildered, not convinced.

I remember a little talk which I had with Carstairs over the matter. It was on what was to have been his last evening at Baychester. He and Tommy and I had dined together at the Hall, for Tommy would never risk dining at Red Rose—poor beggar!—and Tommy remaining behind for some reason, Carstairs and I crossed the gardens and mounted the bit of a hill toward the lights of old Arabella's veranda, which were beginning to prick the gathering dusk. I remember that Carstairs was a bit moody and cast down. He had, for the last time, wrought for hours with Tommy that afternoon, but Tommy was stubborn and would say only no.

"God knows what will come of it!" said the surgeon as we made our way through the gardens. "There is no doing anything with him. Argument and reason make no appeal whatever. God knows what will come of it. Suicide, I dare say, eventually. No man

can bear very long what he is bearing."

"Just what do you make of it?" I asked. "In plain,

unscientific language, you know."

"Oh, it's an extraordinary case, of course," he said, "though not unheard-of, quite. What do you mean?"

"How did he get it, then?" said I. "To what do

you ascribe it?"

"Oh!" said Carstairs, "I didn't understand. Well, of course, one can only form a judgment. One doesn't know. This—young woman appears to have been of an uncommonly strong, magnetic character. I take it that she obtained, during the last rather melodramatic scenes of her life, a powerful influence over Carteret's mind—made a powerful impression upon

him. His mind, at that time, one may judge to have been weak, in a sense. That is to say, he had long been under great strain of melancholy and resistance. He allowed the resistance to give way, and his fagged-out spirit was at its lowest ebb. The young woman took advantage of it."

"Yes, yes!" said I. "I know all that; but this hallucination—this illusion!"

"Possibly a species of unconscious hypnotism on the part of the girl before she was killed," said Carstairs. "If I am right, her words, at the last moment, referred to an intention of coming to him even if she were dead. More probably it is due to the strong impression of that scene and the girl's words which was made on Carteret's mind before the injury to his head, and which was helped on—maintained, as one might say—by a certain mental confusion due to a lesion. I fancy there is a lesion resulting from that fractured skull of his. It would take a long time to explain my theories—and, after all, they are mere theories. The point is, he won't let me operate. So there we are!"

"So there we are!" I echoed with a sigh. "Poor old Tommy! Was ever a man so tormented?" And, as often, a little fit of helpless anger swept over me.

"Why, in God's name, should it be Tommy?" I cried. "What's Tommy being punished for? He never willingly hurt a soul. Why the devil can't sins be paid for by the people who commit them? Why must an innocent man suffer for what he hasn't done? I could manage it better myself!"

"Apply elsewhere," said Carstairs. "I am a surgeon."

Sibyl was at the piano, playing and singing, when we reached Red Rose. Carstairs went in, at once, to where old Arabella and Jimmy Rogers sat in the music-room listening, but I tramped the porch for a few moments to finish my cigarette. Sibyl must have been a bit sad that evening—even Sib's stout heart must have been down for an hour—for she was singing melancholy little German songs with a wail to them—all about partings, and deaths, and lovers who never came back. And, after a bit, she sang "Loch Lomond," as only Sib can sing it, and that nearly finished me, for Sibyl has a voice of living gold, and she never thinks of it or of how it will sound when she sings. She sings with her heart. I have seen her make the most hardened fish for their handkerchiefs—and, at that, she wasn't half trying.

I finished my cigarette and turned into the house, but it occurred to me that it must be uncomfortably warm in the music-room beyond, and I dropped down into a certain big chair which stands among the shadows of the long hall. There was a dim light in the music-room, across from where I sat, and there were lights on the porch, outside, but the hall was dark, and cool, too, for the evening breeze bore in through wide-opened doors and stirred the hangings near my chair.

I heard Jimmy Rogers ask Sibyl to sing the last verse of "Loch Lomond" over again, and I squirmed while she sang it, for that song always makes me choke. Then, when she had finished, and was striking the first slow introductory chords of something else, I heard a step on the porch outside, and Tommy Carteret came into the hall. He went toward the door of the music-room, but Sibyl began just then to sing again, and he drew back and stood waiting until she should finish.

For a moment I thought of starting up and interrupting her myself, for Sib's selection was not fortunate. She was singing a song by E. Nesbit, called "The Past," and I knew how it would be with Tommy. I set the words down here so that you may judge for yourselves, but remember that they were sung in the dusk, among shadows. Remember that Sibyl was low that evening, and that her sadness trembled in her beautiful deep voice. Remember that her voice was hushed—held to half its strength. And remember that Tommy stood without, listening.

Make strong your door with bolt and bar,
Make every window fast;
Strong brass and iron as they are,
They are so easy passed—
So easy broken and cast aside,
And by the open door
My footsteps come to your guarded home,
And pass away no more.

In the golden noon—by the lovers' moon,
My shadow bars your way,
My shroud shows white in the blackest night
And gray in the gladdest day.
And by your board and by your bed
There is a place for me,
And in the glow when the coals burn low,
My face is the face ye see.

I come between when ye laugh and lean,
I burn in the tears ye weep:
I am there when ye wake in the gray day-break
From the gold of a lover's sleep.
I wither the rose and I spoil the song,
And Death is not strong to save—
For I shall creep while your mourners weep,
And wait for you in your grave.

Fate juggled cleverly there—that Sibyl should have sung that song just as poor Tommy came to listen. It was ingeniously cruel. As I have said, I was minded to call out and interrupt her. Twice or thrice I was minded to call out while Tommy stood there rigid, bowed, gripping a chair-back with one hand. But something held me, and I could not speak. Tommy stood quite still to the very end, and then, when she had finished, he turned and went out as silently as he had come. As he went, I saw his face, for an instant, in the light from the porch lamps, and I covered my eyes with my hands. Then he went on alone down through the night to that which waited for him.

"—And by your board and by your bed There is a place for me."

# CHAPTER XXIII

# I COME BETWEEN WHEN YE LAUGH AND LEAN

La nuit porte conseil. Often, also, it brings peace—tranquillity—courage. Many a poor devil has laid his head upon his pillow in bitterness and anguish to awake into a world of sunshine and birds and flowers and sweet air, with that bitterness somehow soothed and calmed—with hope stirred afresh in him. It was so, I think, with Tommy, who had gone to his bed with that cruel song marching and countermarching through his brain (all in Sib's dear voice, too, mind you!)

"I wither the rose and I spoil the song,
And death is not strong to save—
For I shall creep while your mourners weep,
And wait for you in your grave."

There's hopelessness for you, and I know the hopelessness bit deep into Tommy's soul. But in the morning the world smiled at him through his drawn curtains—a sweet summer world with balm in its breath, and there seemed no place there for clouds, no gloomy corners where shadows might lurk. It is hard to be cheerless in the face of such. He breakfasted early—before either Jimmy Rogers or I were down, and went out into the gardens with his pipe. Even the tobacco, he says, conspired with that fresh, aromatic air to soothe and comfort him. He went to the shaded bench under the north wall—there was still dew on

the leaves and turf, fresh unspeakably, delicious beyond words—and he seated himself there, where Sib and he had so often sat together, and the lines of bitterness were somehow soothed out of his face and a little, lazy, contented smile became fixed there.

Then, by way of completing it all, she came to him—Sibyl, all in white and pink; white gown, white hat—a big, flat one with streamers—pink cheeks. She was very like the morning. No! Tommy says the morning was very like her—as like as a mere morning could hope to be. She came to him through aisles of roses, and Tommy says that the roses reached out and tried to touch her as she came—with a view to boasting of it afterward, I expect.

He laid down his pipe as she came near him, and

held out his hands to her.

"I'm the early bird, Sib," said Tommy.

"I am not a worm!" said Sibyl haughtily, but she sat down upon the stone bench beside the early bird,

and she seemed glad to be there.

"I hope everybody else is asleep, Tommy dear," she said. "I want us to own the morning all for our own lone selves. Isn't it the most exquisite thing there ever was, or could be?"

"With one exception," said Tommy. And she

seemed to like that, too.

"You do look like the early bird!" she criticised presently, "after he has eaten the worm. You look fat and sleepy and contented. You're positively smug, Tommy. Has that triumphant smile come to stay for ever 'n' ever?"

"I think so," said Tommy. "Yes, I think so. Smug, indeed! I could beat you for that, if I weren't

far too lazy and comfortable. Call me something else; you're safe."

Sibyl pulled a rose which hung within reach and buried her absurd little tip-tilted nose in it, while Tommy, leaning back against the wall, narrowed his eyes, the better to see, and drew a quick sharp breath of sheer delight at the exquisite young beauty of her, and at the picture she made sitting there with that rose held to her face. She had the very white skin which red-haired women almost always have, but there was a great deal of colour in her cheeks, and this colour came and went with every change of mood. Also her lips were very red—the upper one projecting beyond the lower—and they had a deceitfully pathetic droop at the corners, which had wrought much damage ever since Sibyl had put away short frocks and begun to take notice. Her eyes were not blue, as one might expect, but red-brown, and that is a danger-signalor a thing greatly to rejoice over, as circumstances fall. Further, she had that type of figure in which the late M. Watteau used so greatly to delight—slender exquisitely, but not in the wrong places; slender, that is to say, at neck and waist, at wrist and ankle-elsewhere rounding, tapering delicately, as a girl's figure should be, with lines that grow toward fulness but reach it never. A full curve is an ugly thing! She was taller than Tommy's shoulder—Tommy stood six feet—as tall as his lips, it may be. He had to bend his head, I know, to look full into her eyes. Oh, yes, Sibyl was very beautiful.

"Confession's good for the soul, Sib," said Tommy, watching her with her rose. "'Fess up! How d'you happen to have eyebrows the colour of your hair?

I thought all red-haired people had white ones."

"I dye them, silly!" said Sibyl.

"You don't!" cried Tommy, sitting up. "Non-

sense! of course you don't."

"But I do, child!" she insisted. "Anything but a man would know. I dye them with stuff out of a bottle. It improves them, heaps!"

"Your eyelashes, too?" he demanded.

"No," said she. "Those are dark by nature. I don't know why. But I truly do dye the eyebrows."

"I'm ashamed of you!" said Tommy sternly. "You're immoral, and I always thought you so good."

"Well, I'm not good," said Sibyl, "and you might as well become used to it.—I have red hair," she explained. Then she turned about, sitting beside him on the stone bench, and put out her two slim hands upon his shoulders.

"Dear old Tommy!" she said. And Tommy flushed all at once.

"Oh, Sib!" he cried under his breath, "Sib, you're

so very beautiful!"

"Now, you are a dear Tommy!" said Sibyl. Tommy put up his two hands to hers and took them from his shoulders, and held them against his breast. Something stirred and altered in Sibyl's eyes, deepened, sweetened, but she did not stir them from his eyes. And quite suddenly Tommy began to tremble before her.

"How dear, Sib?" he asked in a whisper. "How dear?" But even as the words came, halting, he dropped her hands and covered his face, shrinking a

bit away from her.

"No! Ah, no!" he cried. "Don't answer me, Sib, I—didn't mean to say it. It said itself. I was mad! For one little bit of a—second, I—forgot. Don't answer me." Sibyl laid her hands upon his

arm. They were light, but the arm dropped under them as if its strength were gone.

"I shall answer if I please, Tommy," she said. "Dearer than I can say. Dearer than all the other Tommies. Dearest of all. So there!"

"I cannot stop you, Sib," said he, and his eyes fronted her, wide with pain and misery. "I cannot unsay what I've said, but— Oh, Sib, Sib, you know! It is impossible that I should ask you such things or listen to you when you answer me. You know, dear." His arms stiffened and his fists clenched fiercely. "If only I were a man like other men!" cried poor Tommy. "If only I were free, unhaunted, unbound! If only I could come to you, Sib, and tell you how I love you, worship you, dream of you, need you! Oh, Sib, you know what I am. You know how impossible all this is. I've been a weak, fond fool to see you like this every day, to find out what a chap's life might be with you in it. I've been a blackguard to drag you into my misery. I've made you unhappy, and for that God will pay me out, one day. Oh, Sib, I told you on that first day to shun me! I told you that every one who came near me must suffer from my curse. I told you I was unclean. See what I've brought you to!" He turned away from her, hiding his face once more, and for a little time Sibyl sat quite silent watching his bent shoulders. I think she could find no words just then.

But after a bit he swung about, and his face was quiet again, but set and hard with the strain he had put upon it.

"This mustn't go on, Sib," he said wearily. "It's an impossible state of things. I've been a cowardly blackguard to make you-let you share what I-have

to go through, but I'll be a blackguard no longer. Lepers should herd by themselves. I'll go away again, or you must go back to town. I will not go on seeing

you."

"Oh, Tommy, dear!" said she, and her voice was near to sobbing. "I do not know what to do or say. I have been so full of hope, Tommy, so certain that we should cure you of—this. I'm certain of it yet, dear Tommy, but I don't know what to do. Oh, yes, yes! We shall cure you, but—what to do? How to go about it?"

"I've no hope of cure now, Sib," said he. "Maybe I had at one time, but it's dead. This thing has come to me—God knows why—and we can't send it away. Do you remember that song you sang last night?

'I come between when ye laugh and lean, I burn in the tears ye weep:

I am there when ye wake in the gray day-break From the gold of a lovers' sleep.

I wither the rose and I spoil the song, And death is not strong to save—

For I shall creep while your mourners weep, And wait for you in your grave.'

"It's like that, I think. It'll wait for me in my grave, and I shall know it's there even when I'm dead."

"Oh, Tommy!" cried Sibyl in an agony. "Tommy, Tommy! Did you hear me singing that dreadful song? I didn't know. I didn't know! Oh, Tommy, it isn't true. I don't know how I came to sing it. It's a horrid song. It isn't true, dear; it isn't. Please don't remember it, Tommy! See! You've made me cry. Oh, I'd rather have died than have you hear me singing that. It sounds as if I believed it, and I don't, I don't!" She did weep a little then, wringing her

hands together in her lap, and Tommy looked away, cursing himself, and stiffening his arms lest they go out to her. Then after a bit, when she had done with weeping and was calm once more, she spoke again.

"Tommy," she said bravely, "look at me and tell me the truth now without scruple or evasion. Never mind why I ask. Do you truly love me, Tommy, better than anything? If it were not for—for this trouble, would you have come to me and asked me to—marry you? See to what unmaidenliness you drive me!"

"As God lives, Sib," said he, and began again to tremble. "As God lives, I love you more than anything or everything in the world, and more than any hopes I have of a world to come. I love you much more than anything like words can even hint. There's no way, Sib, of telling or showing how I love you."

"Then," said Sibyl, "will you marry me, Tommy, now, as soon as may be? I didn't think I should ever come to begging a man to marry me, but I have, and I don't care. Will you marry me, Tommy? Somehow, I feel that if I had you—if you had me always, always with you, you would be cured of—what haunts you. Somehow I feel that if I actually had a—better right to you—all the right there is, this—she would leave you in peace."

Tommy, who had been staring at her, wide-eyed, amazed beyond speech, gave a sudden exclamation.

"Why that—that is odd!" said he. "What's odd, Tommy?" she asked.

"Your—saying that," he said, "that about your better right.' It's an odd coincidence. She said something like it to me once. She said she'd never leave me until some one had a better right to me than hers, and then she laughed and sneered."

"But that's just it!" cried Sibyl excitedly. "That's just it, Tommy! I should have a better right, don't you see? I should be married to you, and she never was. Oh, Tommy, Tommy, don't you see? You have her own word for it!"

For a single mad instant—time enough for the blood to surge up crimson across his face and ebb again—I think he had a shred of hope—saw a glimpse of freedom, but the moment passed, and his head drooped again

and shook slowly back and forth.

"No, Sib," he said. "I will not do it. I will not sacrifice you. Enough have suffered through me already. Not you too, Sib; not you too! What the woman said was a mere chance. Your saying it in something like the same words startled me for a moment, that's all. Coincidence merely; coincidence. No, Sib, dear, I must go it alone. I would suffer ten thousand hells like my hell for ten thousand eternities rather than drag you into this with me."

"Must I beg you, Tommy?" said she. "Must I humiliate myself before you?" But Tommy cried out upon her in a hurt voice, and she hid her face, weeping again softly to herself. And Tommy, beside her, stared bitterly out over the sweet garden, and bitterly into the sweet, blue summer sky beyond, and cried upon his God, asking why Sibyl—whom surely God loved above all things—must have been made to suffer like all the rest.

What befel after this I do not know—pleadings, I fancy, and denials—temptation and resistance. Oh, Tommy was a man on that day! And think what Sibyl offered him, not blindly, mind you, but counting the cost! If Tommy was a man that day, why, surely, Sibyl was a woman. God bless her!

I suppose it was half an hour later that Tommy came up to the house and entered. I saw him as he came in through the open front door. I was in the upper hall, just about to go down, but I drew back for a moment to watch. I saw him cross the darkened lower hall, and he walked like a man who was very ill, bowed, faltering, dragging one heavy foot painfully after the other. Once, I remember, he ran into a heavy, round mahogany table which stood there, and I saw him back away, jerking his head up to look, like a drunken man. He came to the stairs and mounted, very slowly. The carpet had been taken up from them that morning, to be cleaned, and Tommy's feet struck heavy and loud upon the polished wood.

He had almost reached the top of the stairs when he halted suddenly, as if some one had called out to him from below. He turned about, holding by the stair-

rail, and faced the hall beneath him.

"You—there!" he said aloud in a low, thick, expressionless tone, and then his face worked, for an

instant, and a dull flush came up over it.

Of course it was not until long afterward that I learned what passed on both sides of this scene. Of course, at the time I heard only Tommy's side, and it was the more dreadful so, I expect; but now, as I look back at it, I seem to see it all as it really occurred. I seem to see the woman standing down there in the lower hall jeering and mocking at Tommy on the stairs, bending her body back and forth in ribald laughter at what she conceived to be an excellent joke. It seems that she called out to him as he was nearly at the top of the stairs. It was then that he turned. And it seems that she began to laugh, standing by the round mahogany table which had got in Tommy's way, and, laughing fiendishly, taunted him with the

scene through which he had just passed with Sibyl, asserting that she had heard the whole thing from behind a near-by bank of roses. It seems that she quoted extracts from the scene—things that Tommy had said and that Sibyl had said—laughing the while in coarse triumph. It seems that she went on from that to a free expression of her feelings toward Sibyl—you must imagine her words—but here Tommy broke fiercely in upon her. He had been standing by the stair-rail, but he moved back from it and leaned against the opposite wall, and, all at once, he began to shake very violently. This was when she commenced upon Sibyl. He broke fiercely in upon her and cursed her in low, deliberate, dreadful words—words I had never before heard from Tommy—and at some length.

"—and by the God who made you," he concluded, "and sent you here to torture me, I'll pay you out for that. I'll tear your damned head from your body, with my hands!" He must have gone quite off his head then, for he turned and sprang down the stairs toward the woman who stood there jeering. I started

after him quickly, and called out:

"Mind the stairs, Tommy! Mind the stairs!" for I saw his danger. But I was too late. His feet slipped on the polished wood, and he began to fall forward. He made a last convulsive effort or two to catch his equilibrium, but his feet, beating at the steps, only thrust him downward. He fell the entire length of the stairs and lay huddled at the bottom—huddled and still.

When I reached him and turned him over, one side of his head was wet and crimson, and under it, where it had lain upon the floor, a little pool of blood had already formed. I felt for his heart, and it seemed to me to be quite still.

## CHAPTER XXIV

## TOMMY COMES TO THE RIVER'S BRINK

How long I knelt there beside Tommy in the cool, darkened hall I do not know, but I know that I said

over and over to myself:

"He's dead! Tommy's dead. Tommy has done for himself!" I know that I felt for his heart again and found no stir, and I know that that wet, crimson stain at the side of his head spread downward and began slowly to drip, drip, hotly upon my hand, and from it to the floor. Then, I suppose, I wakened to my senses and called out frantically for Parkins, for Jimmy Rogers, for any one who might be near.

Steps came hastening from one of the rooms beyond, and some one bent over me. It was Parkins, white-faced, trembling a little, but self-contained as ever.

"Mr. Thomas has fallen and hurt himself," I said. "Go at once to Red Rose for Dr. Carstairs. Look sharp, man! There is no time to lose." Parkins ran. I fancy it was the first time he had run for years, and I heard him, out on the veranda, shouting. Carstairs must, by good chance, have been somewhere within sight. Then he came back, and, after him, Carstairs, with Jimmy Rogers close in the rear.

Carstairs dropped on his knees beside me and bent over Tommy's head, feeling at it with quick, expert fingers. "What happened?" he asked, and even in the midst of my dread and anxiety I noticed the sharp professional

ring in his tone, the setting aside of personality.

"He fell down the stairs," said I. "He fell forward almost the entire length of the stairs, and I think his head struck against the sharp corner of that post. Is it—bad?" Somehow I did not dare ask the question

which was on my tongue—Is he dead?

"Yes," said Carstairs, "it's bad. I don't know how bad. Here, help me with him! Help me to carry him up to his bed." He jerked a quick order over his shoulder to Parkins for water and cloths and such, and then we stooped, Jimmy Rogers helping us—I caught Jimmy Rogers's eye once for a second, and I'll swear there were tears in it—and raised poor Tommy's limp body—I shall never forget the horrible deadweight of it—and bore it carefully up to his room and laid it on the bed.

I shall not go into what followed. I should be wearisome. Parkins brought cloths and water and helped the surgeon get Tommy's clothes from him. I dashed across to Red Rose for Carstairs's little bag of restoratives and the like, and then we waited, Jimmy and I, outside the closed door of Tommy's room-Carstairs would have no one but Parkins in there with him. It seemed many hours that we waited, fidgeting about, talking instinctively in low, hushed voices, speculating, striving each to assure the other that the thing was of no great moment—that Tommy had but bumped his head and been knocked out for a bit. Each of us was full of tales, I remember—tales of similar accidents; and all the tales ended happily. Now, looking back upon it, I can laugh, for we must have been, in our solemn fashion, very absurd; but, at

the time, there was no laughter in us—nothing but a great shivering dread.

I remember that presently, as we waited there, the tall clock in the hall below chimed musically and struck the hour, and I remember that Jimmy and I disputed over the count and pulled out our watches, each to prove that he was right. Jimmy was. It was ten o'clock. Then, following upon that, we heard old Arabella Crowley's voice at the door, hurried, breathless, broken with fear. I tiptoed to the head of the stairs and beckoned her up, and there were three of us to wait. Sibyl, it seemed, was away somewhere in one of the motors.

I say it seemed hours that we waited in the cool, dim hall outside Tommy's door. Probably it was a matter of fifteen minutes. Then, quite suddenly, while I was in the course of some football yarn about a chap who had been kicked in the head and rendered unconscious for half a day, the door opened, and my voice ran up into a queer falsetto squeak and broke off. It was Carstairs, coatless but calm, who came out, and a queer, pungent odour of drugs followed him.

"Where is the telephone?" he asked. "I want to telephone into town. I want a nurse and Campbell and Hawes." He named two names great in the surgical world.

"How is he?" I demanded. "Is he—is he—" My throat was oddly dry, but I burst out with what had been on my tongue, earlier down at the foot of the stairs. "Is he—going to die?" I asked.

Carstairs shook his head.

"Die?" said he. "Die? Oh, no, he won't die. We shall pull him through, right enough. It's not such a very bad knock. That's not the—point, quite."

He looked up at me, and there was, I thought, an odd expression in his eyes, an odd half-smile about his lips.

"It might interest you to know," he said, "that Carteret has cracked his head open in exactly the spot where the bullet cracked it before." It was not until he had turned away toward the telephone, which Jimmy Rogers pointed out to him, that I understood what he meant. I met Arabella Crowley's eyes, and Arabella nodded. She knew, too, it would seem.

The two great surgeons arrived between twelve and one, coming down from town in a fast motor-car. They brought nurses with them and an assistant, who carried their long, black leather bags of instruments. Carstairs met them at the veranda and took them at once up to the room where Tommy lay with his broken head. Sibyl had, by this time, come over from Red Rose, and the four of us waited below. I think our nerves were nearly at the limit of endurance when, at the end of something like two hours, we heard a door close gently in the upper hall, and, after a moment, low voices on the stairs.

Carstairs brought his two colleagues into the library to speak to Arabella Crowley, whom both of them knew, but, as the others stood in a little group talking together, I drew Carstairs aside and got him into a corner.

"Successful?" I asked anxiously.

"Eh?" said he. "Eh, what? Successful? Oh, yes! I had no fear. Carteret will be up and out again in a few weeks."

"Yes, I know," said I. "That wasn't what I meant. I meant successful in the—other thing?" He did not affect to misunderstand me.

"The-lesion?" he said. "Of course in a case of

this sort—a second fracture in the same area—it's very difficult to be sure if there was such a thing—if a lesion had existed. Between you and me, we—Campbell and Hawes and I rather—er, disagree. It would have been easy to determine but for this second accident, this second fracture. I don't know. I—hope." I thought Carstairs seemed a bit nervous, a bit distrait. Some of his old-time assurance had, I thought, disappeared.

"Anyhow," said I, "if he's getting on so well, we shall soon know. He'll be able soon to tell us if the—

thing still haunts him."

"Eh?" said Carstairs absently. "Yes, yes. Quite so!"

"For, of course," I went on, "it was all in his head, poor chap! It had no independent existence as he believed."

"Ye-es," said Carstairs again, stroking his chin. His manner annoyed me.

"Well, had it?" I cried sharply.

"I never saw the apparition myself," said Carstairs. "Still, there are more things——"

"And you call yourself a surgeon!" said I. Carstairs scowled.

"I didn't say the thing existed," he said; "but Carteret was firmly persuaded that it did, and—we surgeons can cure the body only. We can't alter a man's beliefs."

"But look here!" said I. "If Tommy gets well and finds himself free of his hallucination—finds that she doesn't haunt him any more, this woman of his—he'll believe it then, won't he? He'll be all right then, won't he?"

"I don't know," said Carstairs, in that irritating new

manner of his. "I've been thinking it over and I don't know. Belief's a strong thing. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, we—and this lucky accident, together, have set Carteret physically back on his feet once more—normal as you or I, but that's all. We've cleared the path: now make him believe it's clear, if you can. I've been thinking it over. I don't know."

"Oh, you're an old woman!" said I rudely. And just then Sibyl came up to us. Her face was flushed and her eyes bright, but I noticed that her hands were trembling. Poor Sib! Those two hours had tried

her sorely.

"You've—saved Tommy for us, Doctor Carstairs?" she said, smiling up at him. Carstairs made her a little awkward, jerky bow. He was not at his ease with women.

"I've done my work, Miss Eliot," said he. "I turn him over to you, now. There'll be work for you to do, still." Sibyl drew a little quick breath.

"I'll do it!" she said. "Oh, never fear! I'll do

it."

#### CHAPTER XXV

## JIMMY AND I MAKE A JOURNEY

One of the great differences between living through a series of events and writing about the same is that in the writing you may, if it seems best to you, skip. In the living, you must live through the tedious days as well as the exciting ones. Just at this point in Tommy's history I am going to skip. I shall skip almost a month, and I trust you are properly grateful. I skip, not because my knowledge of him ceases here or is intermitted, but because there is nothing to tell. I left Tommy in his bed with a skull cracked by accident and otherwise punctured and bedeviled by science. One man's convalescence from such a state as this is much like another's, and all are very dull. I shall pick Tommy up again at the time when he was almost able to be about once more.

During this interval of three or four weeks Arabella Crowley and Sibyl remained constantly at Red Rose, and attended Tommy with all the devotion which those two very adequate professional women, whose business it was to care for him, would allow. Sibyl confessed to me, long afterward, that the two most thorough-going hatreds of her life had been for those two hard-working nurses—all because they wouldn't let her kill Tommy with care and kindness.

Jimmy Rogers and I were back and forth between town and Baychester, spending about an equal portion of time, I should think, in each. But we were all at Red Rose and the Hall at the time—mid-August, it was—at which I again take up the march of my tale—Tommy's history. I remember that the four of us, Aunt Arabella Crowley, Sibyl, Jimmy Rogers and I, were sitting on the seaward veranda of Red Rose one morning when Carstairs came slowly up the hill from the Hall. I remember noticing, as he approached, that he looked tired, as if the heat—though it had been a cool summer—might have pulled him down a bit.

He nodded to us pleasantly enough and dropped down into a chair, which creaked and whined under

him.

"How is Tommy?" asked Arabella Crowley.

Carstairs shrugged his shoulders.

"As usual," said he, "waiting for his—friend, expecting to see her open the door and walk in at any moment. I can do nothing with him. Argument is as useless as it was before his accident. He is really able to be up and about, for a short time each day, but he won't get up because he is afraid. He thinks she may be waiting for him below stairs or in the garden."

Mrs. Crowley shook her white head.

"Poor Tommy!" said she.

"Yes; but look here!" said I. "If he never sees her, if she never comes to him, he must know something is different. He must realise that he's better off than before. He—he hasn't seen her, of course—since the accident, I mean?"

"I think not," said Carstairs. "I've asked him repeatedly and he's unable to say outright that he has seen—the thing. He thinks he did along at the first, but I am convinced that he dreamed it, and that, considering his feverish state and all, he does not now

separate dream from reality. Certainly he has not seen—her during the past fortnight, but if you think he bases hope or belief on that you've only to argue with him about it."

"I have," said I. "I argued with him yesterday—that is, I argued at him. It's—it's maddening! Here he is, free, free, and he won't walk out of his prison. Of course he will in time. He'll realise that he's free in time?" I spoke half in question, looking at Carstairs, but Carstairs shook his head.

"Belief's a strong thing," said he. "Men have died of having the back of a knife drawn across their throats in the dark, and warm water dripped down their bodies as if it were their blood. Belief's a strong thing, and an enduring one."

"But what's to be done?" I cried. "For God's sake, what's to be done? We must do something to save Tommy!"

Sibyl rose from her chair and went slowly down the

steps of the veranda to the turf below.

"Come and walk a bit, Bill!" she said. "I want to talk to you." And, when I had joined her and we had walked a little way down toward the shore of the Sound, out of earshot from those on the veranda, she looked up into my face, squeezing my arm with her hands, as she walked beside me.

"Yes, Bill, dear," she said, "we must do something

to save Tommy."

"I'm open to suggestions," said I rather bitterly. "I'm open to suggestions, but I can suggest nothing myself, Sib. I'm at my wits' end. If you could persuade Tommy's late friend to come back for a final appearance, now, and assure him herself that she was leaving for good, that would be worth doing." I

laughed, but there was no fun in the laugh, nor any in

my heart.

"Yes, Bill!" said Sibyl. "That would be worth doing." She gave my arm another affectionate little squeeze "Sometimes, do you know, Bill," she said, "you're really and truly ingenious." I looked down at her suspiciously and Sibyl laughed in my face.

"Listen!" she said. "Listen to me, now, and don't interrupt until I give you leave. Don't laugh either, if you can help, because I'm very serious and because I want you thoroughly to understand from the beginning.

You've a big part to play in this, Bill."

So Sibyl set to work to tell me how we were to save Tommy. I do not know whether the amazing scheme had come to her suddenly, while Carstairs was talking to us on the veranda, or was of slow growth—had been long maturing in her mind. In any case, it was a thing to make one gasp and stare. I did laugh—against orders—at first. The thing was so very mad. But the laughter died, as Sibyl went on with her plan, and very soon she had me saying eagerly: "Yes, yes! Get on with it!" whenever she paused for breath. She had my eyes bright and my breath coming fast.

"By Jove, Sib!" I cried when she had finished speaking. "By Jove!" and for quite two or three minutes my tongue would form no other words, but stammered only "By Jove!" over and over again. "It's desperate!" I managed finally to get out.

"It's desperate!" I managed finally to get out. "It's madly desperate. If it should fail, now! Tommy'd never forgive us, you know. Heaven knows what might happen if it should fail."

Sibyl's sweet lips drew together a bit and her face

was white.

"Our case is desperate," she said. "We've got to

save Tommy. Never mind what it may cost. Never mind the risk. I'll risk it, Bill, and I know what I'm risking. Will you?"

I took Sib's hands and gripped them hard in mine. "Oh, why isn't there another like you, Sib?" said I, looking down into her face with a little wry smile. "Why must Tommy be the only king left in the world?" Sibyl freed one hand and patted my arm.

"You're such a dear Bill!" she said, as if that might make it up to me. "If it weren't for Tommy, now,

Bill," said she.

"Sib!" I cried, threatening her with violence, "stop it! You're positively stroking my back down! You're positively saying 'Pretty puss!' to me. I won't have it. Oh, yes, I'll go in for your mad scheme, and I expect we'll all come a tremendous cropper and be worse off than before—— No, no! I don't, either, Sib, dear!" for Sibyl showed signs of tears. "No, I don't! I'm a brute, a snappy, bitey brute! I take it back. We sha'n't come a cropper at all. We shall win, Sib, dear, and we shall save Tommy, and it'll all be your work. Yet, I do wish there was one more of you! I begrudge Tommy his heaven. I'm jealous! Come, we must go up and astonish the others! Fancy how Carstairs' eyes will stick out! He'll think we're quite mad."

He did. So did Arabella Crowley, and so did Jimmy Rogers, and they all said so promptly and with no regard whatever for our feelings. But Sib and I stood firm. We explained the thing in detail, and allowed their slow minds and meagre understandings, step by step, to appreciate its splendour. Then we sat back and said: "If not that, what then? What do you suggest?" And there we had them. None of

them could suggest anything, and little by little, an inch at a time, we won them over until there were four people on the veranda of Red Rose, all sitting up, straight and bright-eyed, all trying to talk at once, and all full of enthusiasm over the scheme which was to save Tommy Carteret from—what, I wonder? I wonder if any one of us had ever dared speculate upon what would become of Tommy if we left him to himself and to that fate which walked with him.

Jimmy Rogers and I went into town that evening. We saw Tommy before we left—talked with him for a few moments, and we told him that we should be away for three or four days. I think we said we were going to Newport. At any rate, I remember that Tommy cursed us freely, with something like his old spirit, for going to nice places and having a good time when all he was up to was lying in bed and wishing he might die. The next day, at 2:45 in the afternoon, we left New York for Chicago, on the very fast train which makes the distance in the widely advertised time of twenty hours. En route, we pored over maps and time-cards, so that when we reached Chicago, somewhat before ten of the next morning, we knew exactly what to do:

Our train on the Illinois Central, south-bound, left almost at once, but it was a slow way-train—its very wheels shrieked with triumph when now and then it accomplished a speed-burst of fifteen miles an hour—and we had three and a half weary hours of it before we clambered out, stiff and begrimed, at a queer little, red-frame station, behind which unkempt streets, and more unkempt houses of one or two stories, straggled aimlessly away.

Before the station a sort of common stretched—we

knew it was a common, because a flag-staff stood in its centre—and on the opposite side of this space, sheltered by dusty trees, an unpainted edifice bore the sign:

# "Post-Office and General Store"

"That's Winston's!" said Jimmy Rogers. "D'you

suppose we might get a wash-up there?"

Winston—I knew him at once from Tommy's description—rose from his seat with the city fathers, as we approached, and obligingly removed a mouthful of tobacco before greeting us. When we told him that we were there on business of Carter's—Carter, late of Half-Breed Hill—the post-office, store, village, and Winston's life were ours. It would seem that Tommy had found a place in certain hearts here.

Winston gave us the wash-up for which Jimmy Rogers' soul cried out, also something out of a stone jug which we both praised. I would have died rather than repeat the dose. He asked us numberless questions about Tommy and Tommy's fortunes and present whereabouts, and, in the end, set us on our way, with horse and two-wheeled cart, when we said that we must

see the man Jared.

"It's shorely a plumb cur'ous thing," he said as we were starting, "you two gen'lemen a-comin' hyuh to see Jared, jest now. Jared married himse'f las' week. He married Mrs. Barrows, as was—Rose Barrows, ole Dave Canfield's gal. She was a widow woman an' the sister of ——" He hesitated a bit awkwardly, "the sister of that there Marianner Canfield 'at Mr. Carter was a-goin' to marry."

"Very curious," we agreed, and, as we drove out along the white dusty road, "What luck! What golden luck!" For this marriage removed one of the greatest obstacles we had to face.

We had no difficulty in finding our way over the nine miles to Half-Breed Hill. Winston had told us of the few turnings we had to take, and the way was plain. Once, I remember—it was just before we entered a stretch of oakwood—we passed a house set back some distance from the road, and hedged about with lilac and box, a rather superior-looking place for this out-atheels country, and this, we said, must be where poor Henry Canardon lived so long and drearily, and died with such terrible swiftness.

A tall, lank young man, with reddish hair and good, merry, twinkly eyes, raised himself from the depths of a steamer chair as we drove up beside the cabin—a steamer chair here in Egypt-land! It was as if I had known him for years. Tommy's word-painting was good.

"You're Jared!" said I, and the tall young man's eyes opened wide. Then a flush came up over his

tanned face and he reached for my hand.

"You-all has come from—him!" he said. "Git down! Git down out o' that! Gawd-a-mighty!" He lifted up his voice to call, and a woman came to the door of the cabin, a woman at whom I looked with some eagerness, for now I was to see the living likeness of what followed and haunted poor Tommy.

Yes, she had been handsome. No doubt of that. She was handsome even now in a florid fashion—a big, coarse fashion. There was the gipsyish look I had expected, the red mouth and dark eyes and mass of black hair, but this woman was not one to jeer and curse and torment. She was one to smooth and render faith-

ful, dog-like service. Just the difference, as Tommy had outlined it to me!

She went a bit pale, I remember, when we told her who we were—friends of his, and something rather puzzling came into her eyes. Long afterward I understood, but not just then.

We talked, all four together, for a few moments, Jared full of questionings and exclamation, the woman silent—wondering, I fancy. Then, after a bit, I left Jimmy Rogers to explain our errand to the master of Half-Breed Hill, and I drew the woman aside. We sat down on a certain bench which stood in the shade of the cabin, to the north, and I told her as fully as I might, without wasting time, all the story—all that had happened to Tommy since that night, a year ago, and, for the most part, she listened in silence, watching my face with her great shadowy eyes. Only, when I came to the matter of the dead girl's returning to haunt the man whom she had been about to marry, the woman stirred, and an odd, bitter hatred wakened in her face.

"Yes!" she said under her breath, "yes, she'd do that, Marianner would! That there's like Marianner!" and so fell silent again, watching my face. She showed no astonishment at all over the extraordinary improbability of the tale. She did not laugh or exclaim or intimate that I was weaving fiction, only listened very gravely, nodding from time to time.

I told her of Tommy's late accident and his cure (or what we held to be his cure), and of his refusal to believe that the thing had left him—of his certainty that she was only waiting to hurt him the more, only playing at cat-and-mouse with him, and finally I told her of our daring scheme, and what we wished of her by way of carrying it out. After this she sat without speaking,

for a time, and I know my heart beat fast. So much depended upon her whim! Then she asked a few keen, shrewd questions about his condition, the possibilities of the plan, our arrangements, and the like, and at last she nodded her head.

"I'll do it," she said. "I'll do all I can. Maybe we-all can save him." I was close upon shouting aloud

for joy.

"By Jove!" said I, "you're a good woman. By Jove, I'm—I'm proud to know you! I—Jared's a lucky man." That embarrassed her a bit, I fancy. It may be that she thought I was poking fun at her, or something of the sort, for she flushed and looked uncomfortable for a moment. Presently she fell back again into her silence, staring across at me or out over the tree-tops.

Then, after a long time:

"Do you-all think he—he loved—Marianner?" she asked. She spoke in a deprecating, apologetic tone, embarrassed rather, but I could see that she was very serious. I did not know what she wanted me to say. I risked the truth so far as I partly knew, partly guessed it.

"No," said I, "I don't think he was." And then I knew, for she said, looking up at me in an odd,

grateful fashion:

"I'm glad."

"I think," said I, "that it was something of this sort. He—well, he expected always to live here. He thought he would never be able to return home. That, in itself, changes a man. He—begins to think differently about a heap of things. Then he was lonely—almost crazed with loneliness, I fancy—"

"Yes," she said, nodding again. "Yes, I reckon he

was right lonely."

"And your sister was handsome," I went on, "and circumstances threw them together. Circumstances made it almost necessary for him to marry her, and—well, there you have it! Love her? No, I don't think he loved her—not as real love goes."

"I'm glad," said Mariana's sister again. "I wasn't just sure. She wasn't nohow good enough fo' him. She wasn't his—kind." Of course, I couldn't say anything to that—not to the dead girl's own sister, but she seemed not to expect any answer. It was as if she

were talking quite to herself.

After this she was once more silent, and I sat watching her, for she began to interest me. But in a few moments Jared and Jimmy Rogers came up, and we all discussed the journey which was before us. On the subject of Tommy's strange malady Jared seemed bewildered and a little frightened. He did not take the thing with the serious calm of his wife, but after his different nature, with many questions and more words and a great deal of amazed awe. It was quite beyond his mind's grasp.

In the matter of fighting for Tommy's cause, it was different. He was willing—nay, anxious, to start for

the battle-field at once, without his coat.

"What, me holp fo' to put him squar' agin?" he said. "Why—why, Hell! I should think likely! Why—ain't he give me this hyuh house an' farm? Ain't he put such a almighty heap o' money in the baink fo' me 'at I don' never have to lif' a han' to work ef I don' feel that-a-way? Ain't he done all that an' mo'? Holp him! Why, they ain't anything we wouldn' do, me an' Rose!"

He pressed us to stay for dinner, for the night, but we declined, and, after making arrangements to meet the

two on the next morning, in time for the north-bound train, we drove slowly back, through the sunset, over the steep hills and through the flat woodlands which Tommy had known so well, and reached the village just as night was gathering.

## CHAPTER XXVI

## MARIANA SAYS GOOD-BYE

THERE has been a great deal written—well or ill—upon the first impressions of primitive and simple folk when brought into surroundings so new to them that they can never have existed even as imaginative pictures, and the subject is perennially an interesting one, but I have neither time nor space—nor, for that matter, inclination to deal with the half-frightened wonderment of the two people whom Jimmy Rogers and I brought from their hill farm to Chicago and thence to New York and finally to Baychester by the Sound. You must imagine it for yourselves. Its telling would but retard my story. This much only I give you. Neither of the two had ever before been on a railway train.

In the morning of the fourth day after our leaving Baychester, we were back there again. We went out from town in a big touring motor-car—it is easier so than by train—and this was, I think, the severest strain to which we were obliged to put our guests from Half-Breed Hill. We went directly to Red Rose, where we found Arabella Crowley, Sibyl, and Dr. Carstairs waiting. We had warned them, by wire, of our arrival.

Sibyl at once took charge of the woman, Rose. There was, by the way, an interesting moment when the two first met, for now Sibyl knew, at last, what Tommy's incubus was like; and as for Jared's wife, she guessed, in an instant—I saw that—who Sibyl was and what

Sibyl meant to Tommy. Aye, an interesting moment, that!

Jimmy Rogers set himself to making Jared comfortable, and planning amusement for him, since the man was to have no active part in the scheme which was forward. Thus Arabella was left with me. Carstairs, after a moment's greeting, had gone back to his patient.

"I am glad to see you back, William," said old Ara-

bella. "You've had a long, hard journey."

"I'd take a longer and harder in the same cause," said I. Arabella patted my hand.

"I'm glad it wasn't necessary," she said. "How

about the woman yonder?"

"She's a good woman!" said I warmly. "She's an extremely good woman. I take it her sister's traits and her own differed somewhat."

"She has good eyes," said old Arabella, "good, honest, faithful eyes. Have you told her everything?"

"Oh, yes," said I. "She knows all that's happened and all that's expected of her. She's letter-perfect, I should think. I coached her up in the train between Chicago and New York. Hang that same train!"

"Ah, now, that is good!" said Mrs. Crowley. "Sibyl was hoping you would do that. Sibyl wants to get the

thing over with to-day."

"To-day!" I cried in alarm. "Oh, I say, that's too—too sudden, you know. We're not prepared. We're not—oh, I say, I begin to feel—shivers, you know!"

"That is just the point, William!" nodded old Arabella. "If we put the thing off until to-morrow, we shall all have shivers. If we put it off until another day still, we shall never have the courage to do it at all. No! Better at once if the woman knows her part thoroughly. It all hangs upon her, anyhow."

"Oh," said I reluctantly, "she is fit for it now, I suppose. Hang it, I—I wonder if it's not too risky—the

whole thing, you know! I---"

"No, it isn't!" said Sibyl behind me. "Stop crawfishing, Bill dear! You've done your work splendidly. It's—in other hands now, and we're going about it at once before we lose our courage." She was pale herself, and her mouth was drawn, to hide its trembling, but there was no lack of courage about her—Sib was plucky!—only a realisation of the tremendous seriousness of the thing we were attempting.

"Do you want to be with Tommy when—when it's—done?" she asked. "Perhaps you'd better, you and

Jimmy and the doctor."

"And you, Sib?" said I.

"Oh, no, no! Oh, no!" said Sibyl, going whiter.
"No, Bill, dear. I—couldn't quite. There's no need, you know. Oh, no! I couldn't do that."

Jimmy Rogers came out upon the veranda just then. "It's to be now, Jimmy," said I; "now, at once!"

"Good God!" said Jimmy Rogers. "Not really?" And I'll swear he went pale. "Here!" said he. "I say, I—I want a drink first. I've got to have a drink!"

"I'll just—er—come with you," said I.

We had the two drinks and started down toward the Hall. I cannot truthfully say that we hastened. Sibyl, who was turning into the house again, called out a last word to me.

"The door into the next room, Bill! The usual door!"

"Right, O!" said I, and shivered. Jimmy Rogers

looked at me disgustedly.

"You looked washed out!" he growled. "Not feeling fit?"

"You go hang!" said I. "Or, rather, go look into a mirror, if you think you're a picture of health and happiness yourself. And now, for the love of Heaven!" I said, as we mounted the stairs to Tommy's door, "take hold of yourself and keep hold. Don't let Tommy suspect that anything unusual is on!" Jimmy cursed at me softly under his breath, and we opened the door.

Carstairs was sitting beside the bed, smoking a cigarette, and Tommy half sat, half lay, propped up with pillows. He greeted us with some enthusiasm—

poor chap; he was deadly tired of bed, I know.

"How's Newport?" he demanded.

"Same hole!" said I. "Same ant-hill, rather. Too many people. Too much to do. Give me peace and quiet!" And a great deal more of that sort of thing. It was hard work, this talking against time. I think we did it rather well, Jimmy and I—Carstairs had made some excuse and gone out of the room soon after we entered. I think we did it as well as it could have been done, and I, for one, am proud. But the heart in me was going by leaps and halts, and my ears strained, until I thought they must burst, for a sound in the room beyond.

It came after about half an hour, I should think, and I know the blood rushed to my face. I know also that it mounted to Jimmy Rogers' face, for I saw it. Tommy went on talking. His less attentive ears heard nothing. Then it came again—a sound of some one moving quietly about, a sound of skirts dragging, of a chair

moved.

Quite suddenly I saw Tommy's body stiffen and remain, for an instant, rigid.

"Is—Carstairs out there in the—hall?" he asked in an odd voice.

"Carstairs?" said I. "Oh, no, I think not. We'd hear him moving about if he were. No, I think he was going over to Red Rose. Didn't he say so?"

"Ye-es!" said Tommy Carteret. "Yes, I-believe

he did."

The sound came again from the room beyonddraperies dragging across the carpet, that unmistakable whispering sound. Also there was a barely audible murmur of song, as if a woman hummed below her breath.

Tommy sank back upon his pillows with a little sigh. I saw the colour begin to fade out of his cheeks and neck

very slowly.

"Tired, eh, what?" I asked cheerfully. "Chuck us out if we tire you, you know!" He did not even answer me-I doubt if he heard, but that colour faded and faded from his thin cheeks, leaving a grey pallor. It almost frightened me. It was like a man dying.

I scowled across at Jimmy Rogers and Jimmy sat up and began to tell some silly tale or other, but I doubt if Tommy Carteret heard. There were shadows about his eyes, and his lips were moving. I pulled out a cigarette and lighted it—one eye on that door beyond. To my dying day I shall take pride in the fact that the

match was sure and steady—did not betray me.

Very slowly, without noise or haste, the door of the next room began to open, and, as I saw it move, a chattering fear came upon me-something like the awful horror of that first dinner in the Hall, but I took firm hold on myself and drove it down. I must not be the one to fail Tommy at this moment. Very slowly the door was pushed inward and a woman stood there, a handsome, gipsyish, florid woman, with her black hair in two braids which hung down before her shoulders almost to her knees; a bold-eyed woman in a soiled, lacy, tea-gown sort of garment, rumpled and unkempt; a red-lipped woman with a wheedling smile; a woman who leered allurement.

Tommy Carteret, lying back gaunt and still among his raised pillows, looked at her, and his hollow eyes burned sombrely. When at last he spoke, I did not know the voice. It was a strange voice. It had dropped half an octave, I should think, in pitch.

"You have come back to me—Mariana?" said he in that deep, slow voice, and his hollow eyes burned at her. I scowled again at Jimmy Rogers and we both

cried out upon Tommy.

"Good God, man!" said I. "Do you mean to say— Tommy, Tommy, has it—come back? Are you seeing her again? Why—Carstairs—my God, Tommy!" Those burning eyes of his turned to me for an instant and Tommy's lips twisted into a wry smile.

"Don't—take it like—that, Bill!" said he. "It doesn't—matter, you know. It isn't as if it were anything new. I was—certain that she'd come, and she has come. We—go through life together, she and I."

Jimmy Rogers was babbling something on the other side of the bed, but Tommy turned his eyes to the woman in the doorway.

"You have come back to me—Mariana?" he said again, and the woman scowled, twisting her hands together before her.

"I reckon I'll come if I-want to!" she said. "Who's

a-goin' to stop me f'om comin'?"

"Not I!" said Tommy Carteret in his still voice. "Not I, Mariana, nor any power on this earth, I think—God, possibly, when he has done with me." The woman gave a little sneering laugh. She had moved

a few steps into the darkened room, but she did not approach the bed.

"You don't seem right anxious for to see me," she

said—"after all this time, too!"

Tommy's eyes closed for an instant, and Jimmy

Rogers leaned forward and touched his knee.

"Is she—still here, Tommy?" he whispered. "Is she still in the room?" Tommy nodded, opening his eyes, and he gazed gravely across the dim room to the woman who stood there frowning at him.

"Did you expect me to welcome you?" he asked. Then the woman cursed him, wickedly, until I could with difficulty hide my amazement, but Tommy seemed to find nothing strange in it—only lay there staring,

patiently, sombrely.

"——An' so I'm through!" said the spirit of Mariana Canfield, venomously. "Hyuh I come to you, takin' a heap o' trouble about it, an' you treat me like I was the dirt unduh yo' feet. I'm through with you. A Hell of a fine time you've gave me whilst I was tryin' to treat you decent, haven't you, eh? Jus' like the dirt unduh yo' feet!"

Tommy Carteret began to tremble very violently, and he put out a groping hand and caught my shoulder

and pulled himself up to a sitting posture by it.

"What do you—mean?" he said in a shaking whisper. "What are you—saying? 'Through with me?' Do you mean that you are—going away—going to—leave me—forever?"

The woman laughed again sneeringly.

"I reckon it'll plumb break yo' heart, won't it?" she said. "Yes, I am a-goin' to leave you. I got somethin' better to do 'an hangin' aroun' a man as hates me. Whyfore do you-all hate me so?" she burst out in a little

flare of rage. "You—you wanted to marry me once! You said you—loved me! Didn't you? Didn't you?"

"Did I?" said Tommy. He was swaying a bit as he sat there, and one hand was over his eyes. I think

his tongue answered her mechanically.

"Didn't you?" she demanded half-eagerly, and I saw her face flush, even in that dim, shaded light. "Didn't you truly never love me at all?" It almost seemed as if she were glad that he had never loved her. I caught Jimmy Rogers' eye across the bed and frowned, for I thought the woman was forgetting her rôle. I need not have been alarmed. Tommy was in no state to observe lapses.

"Not at all?" said the woman softly to herself, smiling. "I'm gla—" She pulled herself up sharply.

"Well, I'm a-going," she said in her sneering tone. "I reckon you-all can live without me hyuh, an' as fo' me, I'm sick of you an' everything about you. I ain't any dawg to be treated like you've treated me."

She moved toward the door by which she had entered, but Tommy Carteret struggled up to his knees on the

bed and his hands went out toward her.

"Going?" he cried aloud. "Really—truly going? Going forever? You'll never come back? You—swear it? I'm to be—free of you—forever?"

The woman glowered at him from the doorway, and

again she gave her nasty, sneering little laugh.

"Do you-all think I've had sech a fine time all these hyuh months 'at I'd want to keep it up?" she demanded. "No, I ain't comin' back. I'm sick of you. I'm sorry I ever did come. . . . Come back? You make me laugh!"

Somehow she must have gone through that door into the next room and have closed the door behind her, but upon my honour, I saw nothing. Suddenly she was not there, and the door stood closed. A bit of an optical illusion, due to my excitement, doubtless, but I remember that the hair once again stirred at the back of my neck, and my forehead felt cold and damp.

Tommy Carteret knelt upright among the tumbled bedclothes, laughing and sobbing—his hands over his face, his body swaying back and forth. Jimmy Rogers and I called out to him, called him by name, but he did not heed. I shook him by the arm, but he laughed and sobbed on. Once he cried aloud:

"Gone! My God, gone!" and his voice broke. And once again, the same thing, breaking into hysteria at its end. And still a third time, face hidden in his hands, he cried:

"Gone, gone, gone! My God, gone!" and then, quite suddenly, fell flat over upon his face and fainted dead away.

## ENVOY

And here, of course, the story ends, for it was to be, you remember, the story of the extraordinary game Fate played with Tommy Carteret, and, after that August morning at the Hall when Tommy, in his darkened room, fell face downward among the tumbled bedclothes and fainted dead away, nothing which might be extraordinary befel—unless, by chance, you join with me in thinking, not jealously, perhaps, but a bit wistfully, that a life lived in the light of Sibyl's eyes is heaven-like enough to be termed extraordinary—aye, more, more!

So Tommy's story ends, with the passing of his curse. I wish there might have been less curse in it,

less gloom and loneliness and tragedy and despair, but I didn't make the story; I only report it. Address your complaints elsewhere. Could I have had the ordering

of the thing, it should have been gayer far.

Still, though, as I have already said, twice, the tale is done, indulge me—who so love to see pictures—for a little moment still. Grant me one more picture—a final tableau, as it were, before the curtain is down to remain.

It is Tommy again whom I see—I shall not weary you with the rest of us who have been, at the best, but grey shades attendant upon him-Tommy again, but this time not alone, quite. There is a ship, a liner, Mediterranean-bound, a ship slipping smoothly and easily through a warm summer sea where there is, at the moment, neither wave nor wind. She has been coasting past islands in the early morning, and now, in the warm dusk with night coming down, she skirts a last island, dim and towering, black green against a torn, sunset sky. There are evening mists about the mountain island-mists which float and wreathe and twist like cigar smoke, ever-changing mists. Out of the gloom, low along the shore, lights gleam, yellow points of light, hospitable and cosy-looking, and—

"See, Tommy! See!" says some one who leans over the rail by Tommy's side, warm against Tommy's shoulder, "see! at the very top of the mountain! One little pin-point of light! Somebody is on the summit. Probably somebody lives there. Oh, Tommy, I want to be the somebody!"

"Alone?" says Tommy Carteret. And Sib gives a little soft laugh in the dark and presses closer against his

shoulder.

"One of two somebodies, Tommy," she says. "Dare you to jump overboard with me and swim to Pico!"

"Come on!" says Tommy. "Come on, Sib!" But at that Sibyl gives another soft little, tender little laugh in the dark.

"No need!" she says comfortably, leaning against him. "Oh, no need! We—carry our Pico with us."

And as if in mighty disdain of such heresy, those lifting, wreathing mists wrap Pico's mountain in jealous arms and sweep it astern until night hides it altogether, and there is left only the torn, western sky, dimming and paling, and the sweet, soft night and the sea—yes, one great star, the evening star, high in the west.

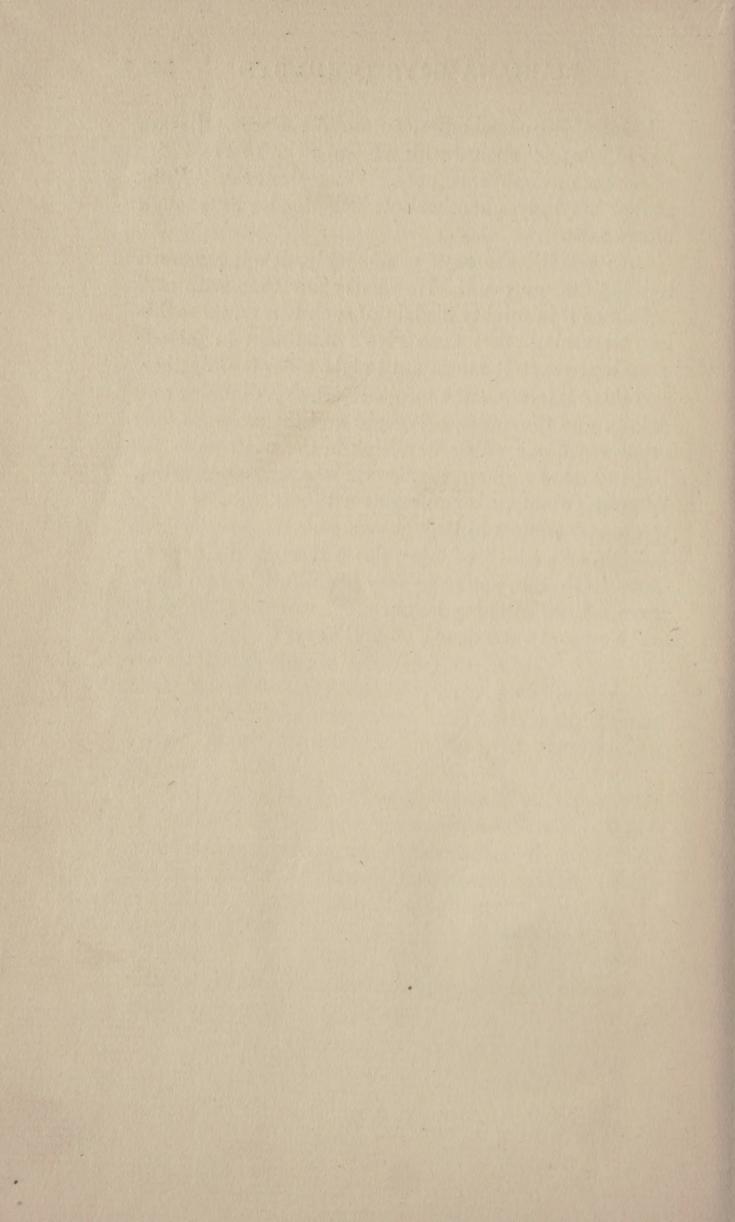
"And that's ours, too," says the grasping Sibyl.

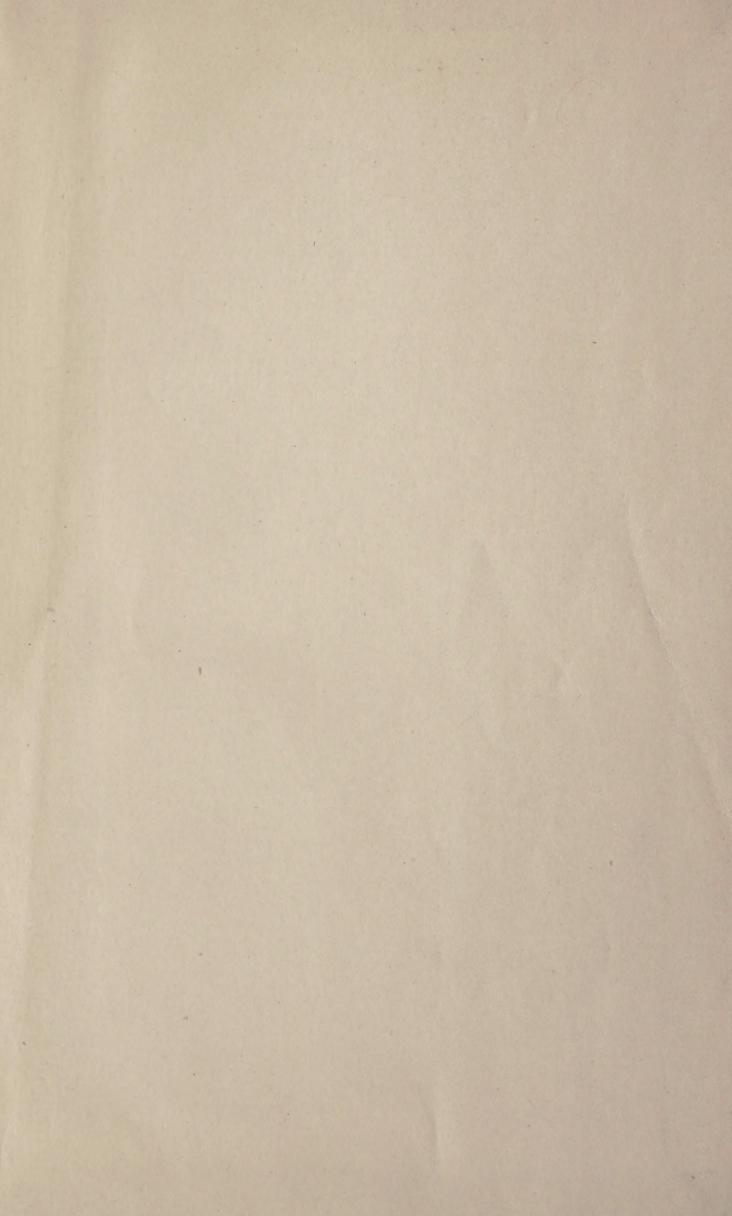
"Look, Tommy, it's smiling at us!"

Tommy prefers to look elsewhere.

"Oh, Sib, Sib!" he cries, down through the dark to her. "Oh, Sib, you're so very beautiful!" And Sibyl gives a little catching laugh.

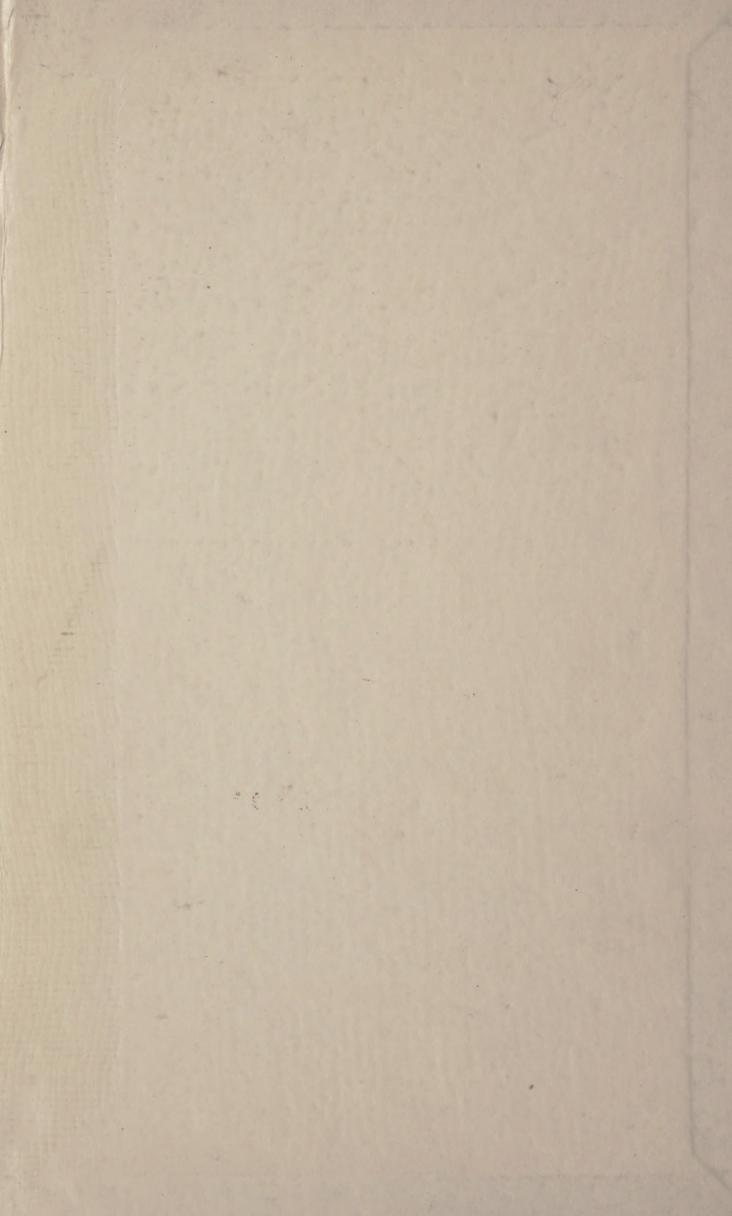
"Now you are a dear Tommy!" says she.





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